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PART I

CHAPTER ONE

OSTROG, POLAND MILLENIUM

How shall I write about a world that is gone? I try hard to recapture my childhood years, I can only see some disconnected images of my home and my family. The world talks about the Holocaust and the 6,000,000 Jews who were killed and I remain speechless and numb, five decades deep in sorrow. Six million Jews, one third of the world Jewish population, perished, most of them from East Europeean countries including my native Poland.

My family lived in Ostrog, a small town in eastern Poland whose history dates back a 1,000 years. The town retains a medieval castle whose fortified walls were walked by princes of the region. According to tombstones in the cemetery, Jews were already settled in Ostrog in the 15th century. Some scholars dates the town's Jewish community to an even earlier period.

Here, as in other places, many Jews lived in the large cities, but a significant number chose to reside in the hundreds of small towns, where it was easier to retain Jewish tradition and culture.

For generations the town's Jews were exploited by the Polish, Lithuanian and Russian rulers. Their property was never secure, in spite of their large financial contributions to the treasuries of kings and tsars. They did not escape from persecution and were often victims of massacres and pogroms. But here Jews never gave up hope and cultural life in Ostrog flourished. As early as the 16th century the Bible and various commentaries were printed there both in Hebrew and in various translations.

During the 16th century, with the annexation of Lithuania, Ostrog became part of Poland. In the 17th century, a new barrage of pogroms was waged against the Jews, this time organized by the Cossock leader, Chmelnitsky. These murderous pogroms reduced many Jews to extreme poverty. Some

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Jewish writers of the time believed that Jews would never be able to reestablish themselves in Poland. But, as many times in the past, they managed to survive and returned to rebuild their shattered homes and Poland remained the center of Jewish living for another century.

My hometown attracted many Judaic scholars who worked, studied and taught in the Yeshivahs. They were respected by the entire community, and in 1932, when Ostrog celebrated the 300th anniversary of Rabbi Schmuel Idlish' death, representatives from all over the country came to honor his memory, a rare gesture towards a Jew.

Because of its vulnerable geographical location Ostrog suffered for centuries under the hand of her three powerful neighbors: Russia, Prussia and Austria. In the1797 partition of Poland, Russia gained the largest area, including Ostrog. In 1920, following World War 1, Ostrog was returned to the revamped Poland and my father's family became Polish citizens. Although they were aware of the existing anti-Semitism, my parents were looking forward to a new and better future. There was hope that the constant fear of persecution could be left behind with the Tsar.

My family now settled in Ostrog, on the river Horyn, which became the official border between the former Soviet Union and their new country, Poland. Like many other citizens, my parents spoke Russian and Ukrainian, but my older siblings now attended Polish schools, where studies were taught primarily in Polish, however, students were required to learn Russian and Ukrainian. Consequently, in many homes like ours, one could hear members of a family speaking various languages. This mixture of three Slavic languages and Yiddish contributed to the new multilingual and cultural richness of the town.

The Jewish community quickly organized itself. Some became peddlers, cobblers, handymen and knife-sharpeners who went door to door for long hours to earn a modest living. Others, opened up small shops and a few even managed to buy some land. This was my father's proudest professional achievement: becoming the landowner of a small farm that he was enable to enlarge in the years to come. After a time, he built a house in Ostrog, 25 km from his land in Wilia. A young man in his 20's he was already on his way to success.

The period after World War I strengthened the spirit of Jewish

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nationalism, as the younger generation, in spite of some improvement in their daily life, realized that there was no future for them in either Russia or Poland. They wanted to be free of intolerance and persecution, to leave behind years of fear and anxiety. For Jews who could not adjust to this hostile environment, Palestine was the only solution. This land was waiting for them, encouraging them to come to live among their own people. Many Jews responded to this call and became involved in establishing the Zionist movement in our town.

Zionism was easier to talk about in Poland now. During the reign of the Russian Tsars, open meetings were forbidden and Zionists had to gather secretly. After1917, however, all Zionist activity was carried out openly and the movement flourished and spread in the 20's and 30's. Meanwhile, conditions for Jews who planned to remain in Poland, were difficult. Those who managed to get a professional degree had a hard time facing discrimination, in search for a job in their field. They encountered anti-Semitic slogans in both small towns and big cities. Displayed everywhere, they read: "Poland for Poles' "Jews to Palestine" "Do not buy in Jewish stores" "Polish business without Jews" and the like. Young Jews turned more and more to the Zionist movement ready to leave for Palestine.

When the Russians invaded Poland in 1939 and occupied Ostrog, they disbanded all existing Jewish societies and organizations. Many active leaders, afraid of being imprisoned, went into hiding before leaving for Palestine.

CHAPTER 2

SLEIGH RIDES AND SEDAR TABLES

Ostrog, full of history and rich in culture, brings poignant and personal childhood memories. Events submerged by layers of memory slowly return to my consciousness. I again see my childhood years in Ostrog, on the river Horyn, in the eastern part of Poland. It was a beautiful town with fields, a slow moving river and ample green parks. Residents of neighboring towns, eagerly came to spend leisure time. On Saturdays and Sundays worshippers

freely attended churches or the "great synagogue", which was located on a hill with a charming view of the entire area. The main street where I lived was wide and full of people, especially on summer weekends. Closed to vehicles, pedestrians commanded the street.

Both young and old found entertainment at Ostrog's two movie houses and a Yiddish theater. In the center of town, a private country club provided room for billiards chess, cards, and taking afternoon tea with friends.

Jews who could not afford to pay tuition in the gymnasium (high school) attended the Jewish school, which had an excellent reputation and attracted many scholars toits faculty. The only high school in town was located far enough away from us to require transportation by horse-drawn carriage. In the winter we were taken by horse-drawn sleigh with little bells ringing. My friends enjoyed riding with us, especially on cold days when the empty roads were covered with snow and ice. We laughed and shouted with joy as the sleigh skimmed over the icy surface of the roadway in the crispness of the winter air. Dressed in tall felt boots, heavy jackets, mittens and earmuffs we hid under the warm woolen blanket, listening to the crackling of the snow. When we arrived we jumped out of the sleigh, wrapped a scarf around our neck and breathed the exhilarating winter air.

School was a serious matter, and provlded only a few activities outside of the academic program, however there was some time for fun in gymnastics every morning. We participated in jumping rope, playing leapfrog, turning summersaults. Dancing was also part of the program. Practicing ballet made me dream of becoming a famous ballerina. The 10 minute break after each class and the one hour lunch period at noon gave us a chance to talk, eat and plan our weekend activities in our homes.

About 60% of the town's population was Jewish. Some leaders even served as Deputy Mayor of the town, quite an achievement for Jews in Poland. Those who were better off financially continued their studies. Some were accepted at universities in Poland, others had to go to Prague, Czechoslovakia or Vilnius, Lithuania. Most of them returned home after completing their studies and worked in their chosen fields as lawyers, doctors or engineers. These professionals became respected members of the community and seldom encountered anti-Semitism. I knew many of them since they were friends of my older brother and sister and often

visited our house which was always open to all our friends.

As in a dream, I can see the joyous gatherings for the holidays at my home. Passover brought together my parents, the five children, my maternal grandmother, paternal grandparents, aunts, and occasionally, family friends. This eight-day holiday inearly Spring commemorates the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. For weeks beforehand, the household was in a state of excited preparation for the celebration, one of the most important and elaborate of Jewish festivals. Our house got a special cleaning. The best holiday dishes were rewashed, silver was cleaned and polished, white tablecloths with large matching napkins were starched, colorful floral bouquets brighthened the formal dining room, and the crystal chandeliers were polished to brilliant sparkles of light. Poultry, vegetables, fruit and dairy products were sent in from the village. The matzos, which had been bought a few days earlier, were put away, to be opened just before the first Seder.

Once again I see my family dressed in new clothes as they waited for the relatives and friends to arrive in the foyer, on the eve of Passover. I can hear the laughter and greetings and still feel the warm embrace from various relatives. We then sat in our assigned seats, with Father at the head of the table, to partake of the ceremonial evening meal of Passover. This Sedar meal takes place on the first and second evenings of the holiday to remember the hardships of the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt. We ate bitter herbs and other symbolic foods from the ceremonial Sedar plate. We all read the story of the Exodus in our Haggadah texts, and we offered the praise to the Almighty for our deliverance.

During this meal, as throughout the festival, we ate matzos (flat, unleavened "poor man's bread") just as the Israelites did who left Egypt in too much of a hurry to leaven their bread. All of our food was prepared and served in special Passover cooking utensils and dishes, uncontaminated by contact with leavened flour products, to remind us of their ordeal.

At one year's Seder a regular participant was missing from our home. Peckman, the town "fool" was an old, poor, lonely and childless man who wandered the streets of the town. Many people made fun of him and most considered him crazy. My Father, however, found him to be a good-

natured human being. Peckman was never alone for Passover; he shared the table with us. So that year we were not ready to start the dinner without him. After our waiting for some time for his arrival, we sent someone out to look for him, telling him not to return without our guest. Only when Peckman finally arrived, did the dinner begin.

I, the youngest, asked the traditional four questions that began : "Why is this night different from all other nights"? While enjoying the dinner, I was hoping to find the matzos that my father hid. According to custom, the children who found them could claim a prize. Half asleep by midnight, I went happily to sleep after my parents made sure that I had my prize.

The festive Passover atmosphere was everywhere; the whole town celebrated and nobody went hungry during the holidays. For those who could not afford to buy food, father provided carts of ducks, geese, chickens vegetables and other foods from our farm. The town's less fortunate people knew that my father would not disappoint them.

At the end of autumn, we celebrated Sukoth (the festival of booths). This joyous festival marks the close of the harvest season in the Holy Land. Traditional Jews observe the holiday by spending time in a lightly constructed booth, covered with thatch to commemorate the wanderings of the ancient Hebrews in the wilderness. Our family enjoyed eating meals in a small room, off the kitchen, that had a removable roof. Our ceiling was the tangle of loosely connected wooden sticks, and we could see the heavens, as prescribed, from our seats.

The hot summer was behind us and we could watch the colorful autumn leaves through large windows overlooking the back yard. Around the trees, birds could be seen gathering the remaining kernels of nature's abundance before leaving for the winter. Especially at Christmas time, even now, I think of the non-Jewish friends I left behind. They never realized that our friendship helped me to survive the war. We used to go to each other's homes during holidays and learn about each other's customs and traditions. Hanukkah often falls during the Christmas season which enables Jewish children to take part in the festivities while retaining their own culture.

My Christian friends were also busy buying gifts for their friends and relatives, decorating their homes and Christmas trees and happily singing

caroles at home and in the streets. Their mothers, just like mine, were preparing big meals to be taken in their well lit homes. They also celebrated a festival of lights. I always found a common bond between the Christmas and Hanukkah festivities. We cherished our friendship as well as own cultures. During my childhood, I would even accompany my friends to church on special occasions, and listen to the choir. Little did I know how crucial this experience would become. When I took off my Star of David band to hide my real identity during the German occupation, I was scared, but confident that I knew how to impersonate a practicing Christian. I was not afraid to go to church, or to confession. It was easy for me to speak to the priest, who probably suspected my real identity without letting me know. As a matter of fact, he encouraged me to come to church more often and spend some time with him. Also, the prayer book, which my friends gave me, was always in my bag to help to secure my new identity.

In January, 1992 the Museum of Modern Art showed an exhibition called "Rescuers of the Holocaust" with pictures of those who risked their lives to save Jews. I searched for the faces of my friends. They did so much for me and would have done so for others too. Videos at the exhibit recorded the rescuers' memories. It gave me the chills, but confirmed my belief that decent people do risk all for justice without seeking reward. Those rescuers were proud of what they did and many said that they were sorry they could not have saved more innocent lives. And when I looked around the room, young and old were nodding their heads with horror and disbelief on their faces.

All of a sudden, an old scene came to my mind. It was New year's Eve. As usual, at midnight sharp, the Polish policemen followed by the firemen with their loud sirens, came to our house to wish us a happy New Year.They came to show their gratitude to my father for his generosity to the town. After making a toast to the New Year, they left to express their good wishes to other citizens in town.

CHAPTER 3

TOWN HOUSE

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As I recall those years of joy , when my family gathered to renew old traditions,my thoughts go back to the lovely house that my parents had built to their specifications. We all cherished the comfort it provided. In order to make a home for my maternal grandmother, they built a two story building with an apartment on the main floor for her and her youngest, unmarried daughter, Ita. Grandmother was paralysed and had to be wheeled out to the front of the house, where she could watch passers-by, strolling along the main street. Sometimes aquaintances would stop to chat with her.

I still remember her sitting outside, near the gate, accompanied by one of her daughters. My earliest and most vivid memories include my grandmother, paralysed but mentally alert, sitting in a wheel chair patiently waiting for the latest gossip. Mother made sure that we spend some time with Grandma every day; she always enjoyed our visits, no matter how short they were.

Ita refused to get married. She felt it was her duty to take care of her mother, since she had no other responsibilities. She did it with love, but occasionally became bitter getting angry with herself and the rest of the family. It was difficult for her to renounce marriage yet she refused to enjoy life away from her mother. This situation needed my mother's good judgment and common sense and Ita would not listen to her. We all wanted my aunt to get married, to have a family and a life of her own. Ita time and again, rejected the idea and refused to develop a social life. All she wanted was recognition for the work she did. When my grandmother died just before the Second World War, Ita was already a lonely woman without a zest for life.

At least Grandma never saw her youngest daughter taken away to be shot and thrown into the massive grave in Ostrog.

My Aunt Mala also lived on the main floor with her family in a two bedroom apartment.Most of the time she spent taking care of her three children, her husband and Grandma. Mala was a very devoted, kind, charitable, and easy going woman. My mother was delighted to have her small family living so close to us.

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Being brought up without a father and with a handicapped mother must have made my mother's childhood quite difficult. At sixteen she escaped by marrying my father. Their marriage was arranged through a matchmaker. Before they were married a year, my eldest brother, Abrasha, was born.

My immediate family occupied the upstairs of the house. It was surrounded by a long deck which led to two of the four entrances. The biggest entrance was used when we entertained important visitors. When the Zionist leader (and later Israeli prime minister) Menachim Begin, was invited to deliver a speech, he stayed in our house and used this entrance. A long hall led to father's office, an elegant room of deep brown color with a beautiful fireplace made of brown tiles. During the winter months one could hear the comforting sound of the crackling coal that had been shovelled through the wrought iron door of the fireplace. I loved that sound, its counterpoint rhythm blending with the other more mellow sounds in the house.

The office had a sliding glass door which, mostly remained closed. On special occasions it was opened to create one big room with the adjoining living room, the most beautiful place in the house. The off-white walls with their hand- painted roses of various colors made the room cozy and elegant. A black Steinway set against the long wall contrasted with the white. My parents tried hard to make us appreciate the beauty of music, but each of us rejected the idea of becoming pianists. My oldest sister, Asya, stayed with her lessons the longest, but we all refused to practice. That piano must have been angry with us for being so neglected.

From the long windows and the exit to the deck we could watch the activities along the street. The friends of my two oldest siblings, Asya and Abrasha, could often be found in the living room, where they played cards or chess until late in the night. They did not disturb anybody's sleep since their friends left by way of the staircase that led to the small gate.

I loved my house because it was bright and spacious but most of all I enjoyed the room that I shared with Anya. I can still see my "junior" bed along the wall facing my sister's bed. In the morning the sun came in through a skylight almost as big as the entire ceiling. In the center of the room was a huge round table where we played, did our homework and entertained our friends. We had lots of fun behind closed doors, playing

games, gossiping and laughing.

I also vividly remember my parents' large and comfortable bedroom next door. In the corner was an Oriental silkscreen behind which stood a big bowl with a tall water pitcher. I can't recall the appearance of the other bedrooms, but Asya's room had an amoire with big drawers full of necklaces that I could wear to parties. None of the rooms were crowded and guests were always comfortable in our home. We didn't have to ask permission to invite our friends and on weekends we took advantage of all our space. Mother enjoyed having our friends around.

The large iron gates at the front entrance looked inviting. They were only opened for holidays and special occassions, like when father came home for weekends. The gates led to separate entrance and exit paths for horses. When we heard the hoofbeats of Father's carriage we came running to welcome him. He would cheerfully greet my grandmother and hurry then to embrace mother before unpacking and settling in.

On occasions like these the kitchen became the hub of the household. Tatyana, the cook, would be busy preparing a variety of breads including my favorite pumpernickel, and cakes which were baked in a huge brick oven built into the wall. Tatyana was a strong woman who handled the large bread shovel with ease and grace. The kitchen had two large sinks for dishes and a long table in the center. My memories of the kitchen include the sounds of neighing horses and our cow's mooing just beyond the wall. The cow provided us with milk and butter that Tatyana, the dairy maid, would beat in a wooden bowl sitting on a low milking chair. Tatyana saw me whenever I snuck into the kitchen between meals to grab some warm, freshly baked pumpernickel. She never reported on me when I indulged my secret delight.

I enjoyed watching the dairy maid milk the cow in the shed and the coachman feeding the horses. There was also the pleasure of greeting the townsfolk who came to use our ice house. This was a large place with a heavy door, whose floor was covered with huge blocks of ice and hay. Since there was little refridgeration available in those days, many people came by to use our facility. It was especially busy during the holiday seasons. My parents were happy to provide this service to many people in town. Without asking for permission, neighbors and friends could go directly to the ice house and leave their bundles of food on the floor. I

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loved being around to meet and chat with them.

Another place to explore was the laundry, located on the lower level. It was in constant use. The difficult job of the laundress involved large wooden basins that were awkward and heavy; no washing machines were available. The laundry room was very hot and steamy, filled with its own special sounds and smells. I can still smell the clean fragrance of soaps and hear the flapping of drying clothes in the fresh summer breeze.

Sometimes, I would stop off in the servants' quarters. It was fun to see people on their time off, dressed casually without their aprons and jackets. They would often be singing, conversing or just relaxing after a long day's work.

Father's arrival always changed the daily routine and the atmosphere of the household. If he came from a big city, we were ready to hear him describe his activities and business meetings. Laughing before the punchline, he would repeat the latest jokes that he heard from his business associates. Although I didn't always find these jokes funny, I laughed anyway - for I could not resist father's robust good humor.

Father had a taste for practical jokes as well. When my American born aunt came with my uncle to visit us, Father decided to play a joke on his new sister-in-law. To honor their arrival from the United States, my parents arranged a big dinner, with relatives from near and far coming to welcome our guests. My aunt was eager to learn a few words in Polish in order to thank everybody for coming to meet her. Father gave her a few phrases and helped her pronounce them. The words she repeated to the dinner guests, however, were not appropriate for the gracious lady that she was. When the family responded with a burst of laughter, she realized what happened. Father found the whole thing most amusing, but my aunt certainly did not. Even years later when I met her in New York, she remembered her embarrassing moment.

Father, most of the time, spent weekends with us, leaving to Abrasha the care of his farming estate, Wilia. He was devoted to us children and was eager to hear about our schoolwork. He listened patiently to our weekly narratives, my mother tremendously these scenes.

CHAPTER FOUR

COUNTRY LIVING

Although we lived in Ostrog all year round, we spent summers in Wilia. The Wilia River, a tributary of Horyn River, formed the border between the Polish village of Wilia and the Soviet Union. Since the border was constantly guarded by Russian soldiers, nobody could communicate with relatives who lived in the Soviet Zone. Once a year people on both sides of the narrow river were allowed to come out and stare at each other, but not to call out to their separated family across the border.

Under these tense conditions, my parents my parents didn't allow us to swim in the river, so close to the Russian soldiers. Because Father did not want us to be deprived of the opportunity to use the river, he built a tall wooden bath house with high walls right on the river. There we could swim under the watchful eye of elder villagers. Occasionally, some swimming Russian soldiers knocked on the wall to tease us, but they swam away without harming anyone.

Wilia was a small village set up on a hill that was visible from from a great distance. The entire area was surrounded by woods, gleaming with white birch trees. The roads were too bumpy for fast carriage driving, which gave me the opportunity to linger over the surrounding beauty. Each turn of the road gave me another lovely view. The scenery was like a picture postcard of checkered green fields, burgeoning fruit trees and vegetable gardens rich with nature's bounty. As we approached our estate in Wilia breathing the clean fresh air, we saw little children with shy smiles running out of their huts to welcome us to the country for the summer. If school was still in session, the teacher would allow the children to come out to greet us when she heard the hoofbeats of our horses. The coachman stopped our carriage to allow us to jump down and exchange greetings.

At the end of the school year we would leave Ostrog with mixed feelings. Although the five of us were allowed to bring a friend for the summer, we missed our daily encounters with the friends who remained in town. We

would also be missing Ostrog's folk dances which I loved. In Wilia we did not participate in similar social activities. With the exception of the miller's and minister's children, we did not play with the local kids. And with no telephone service out in the country, there was no way to communicate with our friends and family back in Ostrog.

But we did have fresh air, delicious raw vegetables, that we ate right from the fields, big red apples picked from the trees and luscious strawberries, blueberries and mushrooms from our woods. We also didn't get too lonesome because we brought some friends with us. They relished the rare treat of a summer in the country, so they were easy to entertain.

We were very active outdoors most of the day. Our favorite pastime was horseback riding. Everybody in the family, but Mother, had a horse; I was the only one with a pony. At times I was quite discouraged because I would slip off my pony and fall to the ground. My family teased me about it but I didn't find it funny. Determined to improve my horsemanship, I practiced a lot and made much progress. My father and brothers were superb, galloping fast and jumping on and off their mounts with ease. My two sisters also rode with skill. All of them wore riding outfits and looked quite suave, especially my younger brother, Grisha, with his tanned face and blond wavy hair.

We were also driven around with our friends in a small one-horse cart. It was especially fun when the coachman entertained us by making some of us spill out on sudden sharp turns. There were no injuries because the cart was so low to the ground.

During the cool days, we would visit the fields, listening to the peasants' songs and watching the girls' ruddy faces and golden braids. They seemed comfortable wrapped in their longfull skirts. At lunchtime, the young girls sat with the men, sharing the food they brought from home. We could see that peasant life was no paradise, however, when we saw the bent backs of the elderly stooped over from a lifetime of physical labor. They struggled all their lives to support their large families who were cramped into small huts.

Some of the workers were intimidated by seeing the landlord's family around, so we tried to stay away from the fields during worktime. By the end of the season we could spend more time in the fields playing in the

tall bright yellow haystacks that were scattered all over many acres. As the end of summer approached, the workers looked happier despite the extra toil of the harvest. They looked healthy and strong as they vigorously cut the remaining hay with their sharp scythes.

At the unforgettable harvest ceremony the field workers would choose the most beautiful girl in the village to be harvest queen, crowning her with a wreath of wheat. Dressed in a pretty and colorful garment she led the procession of workers through the village, singing loudly on the way to our house. The family went out to the terrace at the sound of this boistrous procession to await their arrival. The workers approached and the queen presented father with a wreath of wheat, a symbolic product of their season of labor.. After expressing his gratitude with generous gifts Father dismissed assembly and led us back into the house.

And who can forget the fun we had with our seven or eight dogs? Especially at night, when they were all untied and free to roam and follow us everywhere. They were raised on leftovers and certainly favored the taste of home cooking. These faithful friends were always excited to see us. They showed their joy by jumping all over us.

In Wilia we loved to ride with the workers in simple wagons without seats. The bottom of the wagon was covered with hay, which gave us a rough and scratchy ride that we loved. It was exciting to hear the driver calling the horse to go faster, in that special language of horses and drivers. No luxurious carriage ride could compare to the fun we had in these bumpy wagons, eating delicious cucumbers that we had just picked from the rich smelling earth.

InWilia we lived in a spacious but simple farmhouse with rustic furniture. The most important rooms were the big dining room and the huge kitchen. With no air conditioning, flies came through the wide, open windows. One young man's primary job was to get rid of those bugs with a branch he carried.

My two brothers had rooms in the adjoining house, because they had get up at dawn to supervise the work in the fields. This small house that they shared was sufficient for them and their guests. In the spring Abrasha would do business with suppliers of all kinds of farm tools and machinery. In the fall, after harvest, he dealt with grain buyers and made plans for

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the next season's crops. During the year Abrasha would spend his weekdays in the country and on occasion he would spend a weekend with us in the city.

The main house, where the rest of us lived, was a wooden structure with a huge veranda. The many windows offered a view of the entire village, our fields and the forests. There was a extensive, circular arrangement of flowers, plants and shrubbery up front,so the horses had to circle this whole area to get to the house. This part of the estate was separated from the rest by a tall gate which was usually open. All the stables, sheds, and animal pens were behind that gate, along with a duck pond granery and an old mill. It was a lively place full of farmhands busy with their daily chores.

It was a short walk from the house to where we could watch men train the horses that drove us around. These horses were treated differently than the field horses. We were also frequent visitors to the cow sheds where we observed the dairy maids milking the cows. Another incentive for going there was that we were paid to drink milk. We usually refused to drinkmilk, so our parents had to resort to bribery.

When we weren't busy with all these activities, Anya and our friends would plot a weekend trip back to Ostrog.. We usually needed a medical excuse and I was often the designated victim. After all the pleas with Father to let us go back to the city didn't work, the plan was that I would pretend to have a terrible toothache that required immediate attention from our dentist in Ostrog. I didn't win an Oscar, but I did cry so bitterly all night that even the domestic who took care of me spoke on my behalf to father. He reluctantly gave in. Every summer we managed to find a good excuse for leaving the country in the middle of our vacation. Father kept telling us that someday we would miss our country home and he was right.

It was in Wilia, in 1937, that my sister Asya was married to Stanley. He was the friend that Abrasha had invited to spend the summer with us the previous year. The week preceding Asya and Stanley's wedding was very hectic. Guests started to arrive from other parts of the country, including Stanley's family of eleven. They were a good looking and fun loving group. Our friends and relatives also arrived early. They had to be picked up at the railroad station near Wilia or from Ostrog, requiring a ride in.

The kitchen was busy, day and night, baking cakes and breads, roasting geese and chickens, stewing beef and preparing sauces, desserts and vegetables. While we were playing outside, mother was busy giving instructions. She knew exactly what to prepare and seemed calm for her oldest daughter's wedding. She was very fond of her first son-in-law to be, an accountant with a degree from Warsaw University. He was bright, well educated, highly respected by his friends and co-workers, well mannered and cheerful - the right choice forher daughter. She was pleased that it was going to be a marriage based on love and not matchmaking, an institution which my sister deeply disliked.

The klezmer musicians also came early, to get ready to play for the next few days. On the evening a large white tent was pitched, the surrounding gardens were lit up, and long tables graced with starched white tablecloths and charming flower arrangements were set up. Facing the guests as they entered was a marriage canopy , or chupah, decorated with flowers. As the ceremony proceeded, Stanley and Asya, accompanied by their parents, took their place under the canopy. After a short prayer,the rabbi spoke about the beauty of marriage.The couple exchanged wedding bands and were blessed by the rabbi, who knew my sister since early childhood. According to ritual, Stanley crushed a glass underfoot. This sybolic act reminds us that even on a wedding day, when the bride and groom are only concerned with their joy, we must remember that the world around us is crumbling. We must never forget our responsibilty to repair this broken world.

As the ceremony ended, we all expressed our joy by clapping our hands, congratulating the young couple as the band played happy music. The air was full of laughter and delight. All the relatives and guests were very animated as they danced and sat down to dinner under the dark blue velvet sky. The sprinkled stars were witnesses to this gala event, and the man in the moon wore a bright smile.

The festivities lasted a whole week, and spilled over to the entire village. It seemed like everyone in Wilia peeked through the opening of the canvas tent to share in our happiness. Everybody could hear the music, with songs performed in Polish, Russian and Yiddish. The guests had a great time dancing the tango, the waltz and a variety of folk dances. For me, this was the most beautiful event that took place in the country.

Asya received many thoughtful gifts, chosen with care by our guests. They complimented the dowry that mother had been collecting for years and hadput aside in a big heavy wicker trunk.There were two smaller trunks full of items for Anya and me, that she intended to fill up in the years to come. When the war broke out, mother left our dowry trunks and other personal things with friend for safekeeping. Except for mother's long ermine shawl and a few other items - nothing was retrieved.

Our newest member of the family was something to get excited about. Stanley had a wonderful disposition. Soon after the wedding, he continued to entertained us with his guitar playing old Russian songs as we walked along the deserted fields. He shared with us the poetry that he knew by heart, and taught us to appreciate its lyric beauty We were glad to hear that the new couple would live in Ostrog and that Stanley would be assisting my father with the running of the estate.

It was an exciting summer for us children. Among our new friends there were children our age. They came from the central part of Poland and did not know Russian. They were eager to learn our livelier folk dances and songs. Our new friends reciprocated with jokes and stories, typical for their region. Our guests were fascinated by the dialect that our local workers used, a mixture of Polish, Ukrainian and Russian. They drolly suggested that any publication of their folk sayings would win a prize. It was the Eastern against Central Poland, with both sides touting the charm of their local people and the loveliness of their region. The endless laughter promised a long friendship, which, unfortunately, did not last very long after that summer. Soon war would break out and all the promises of good will would dissipate like mist.

CHAPTER 5

GUIDING BY CANDLELIGHT

It is difficult for a child to be objective about a mother. When I think of mine, I see our entire household which she personified. My mother was fully in charge of our domestic life. Soft spoken and good natured, she oversaw every aspect of our lives without shouting at her husband, children or domestic help. But she had a way of letting her views and

demands be known. Twice a year, when she went to a spa either in Poland or Czechoslovakia, she made sure that our needs would be taken care of while she was away.

When I picture mother, I first envision her standing at the dining room table on Friday night with a long white lace shawl, covering her head and shoulders. The family is about to start dinner and she is ready to light the two long candles in the tall silver candlesticks. Covering her face, she whispers a short prayer and wishes us all a peaceful Sabbath. She performed this solomn right every Friday night. In this wonderful waya she set the tone for a warm, traditional Jewish home.

My parents attended synagogue on Jewish holidays, and we joined them at the services, however reluctantly. Dressed in new outfits, we never disappointed our parents by failing to join the family troupe of seven. I was the youngest of five children. Married at the age of 16, my mother wanted a large family like my father's - with 11 children. Sadly she had four miscarriages before I was born. Since my paternal grandparents were also young, Grandma and my mother were often pregnant at the same time. That is why I had two aunts and an uncle who were younger than my two oldest siblings. We all stayed close as an extended family.

We suspected that my oldest brother, Abrasha, was mother's favorite. Of course she never admitted it. As the first born, he was her defender, confidant, advisor and friend. When my parents disagreed, Abrasha would step in and support Mother. He was the only one of us who dared to challenge Father. While mother never openly showed more feelings for her eldest son, her tone of voice, revealed her emotions whenever she spoke about him.

When Abrasha was studying law in Warsaw, mother would often send him extra money and food packages to share with his friends in the dormitory. She liked his friends who were bright and well educated, and she always warned him not to hurt his girlfriends, who often fell in love with him and refused to date other young men.

Mother had other reasons to worry about Abrasha being away from home. She was aware of growing anti-Semitism and the support for Hitler's ideas among university students, especially in the bigger cities. Very few Jews were admitted to the universities and those who were lucky enough

to be accepted, could not find jobs in their profession after graduation. Historians like Shetel record how Polish college students would organize assaults against campus Jews.[Sheftel, p. 21, Ostrog book] Positioning themselves in two rows, they would corner a Jewish student and force him to run the gauntlet. They hit their victim with metal bars, and the blow often proved to be fatal. The newspapers did not report such incidents, but returning Jewish students would recount the events to their familys and friends. Winesses report that as the brutally beaten Jewish victims lay on the ground, passsersby expressed their pride in the young generation of Poles. They said how the Jews deserved to be punished for pushing their way into the universities.

In college lecture halls Jewish students were relegated to special seats. Those who refused to comply were forced to listen and take notes while standing in the back. The non-Jewish students did not like this bold posture of protest so they would break windows in Jewish dormitories, without the slightest concern for police intervention. In some cases, severely beaten Jewish students required so much hospitalization that they had to withdraw from their studies.

When Father came to Warsaw in 1934 and visited Abrasha in the Jewish dormitory, he suspected that his son was getting extra money from home. This was being spent on entertainment at the expense of his studies. He warned Abrasha to take his school work more seriously. They agreed not to say anything to mother. Only much later did we learn from father that he knew about mother's indulging of Abrasha long before his visit to the dormitory.

During Father's frequent absences from home, Mother had guests both male and female, who came to spend an afternoon with her. They enjoyed her hospitality and easy manner. We used to tease her about her boyfriends and she laughed with us. Her tolerance and sympathy for people were her greatest assets. She was always ready to help the needy and to comfort to people in distress. She never tolerated poor manners so she would be furious if we made jokes about her guests style of dress. Her friends were all civil and polite, never offensive in their conversation.

I recall one day when Mr. Zucher, an old friend, came to visit her. It was cold and windy, but we were running along the streets in a torrential rain, without raincoats or galoshes. Mr. Zucher passed us on the way to our

house and he saw our dripping, wet faces enjoying every drop of rain. He told Mother only that he saw some children who were wrongly allowed to leave the house without being properly equipped for the foul weather. He never told mother that he was referring to us, but Mother was sure that we were the children in question. Although mother did not reprimand us, we were made aware that whe was embarrased and hurt. She wouldn't admit to Mr. Zucher that we refused to wear all that burdensome clothing.

Since we had a housekeeper and a cook, mother did not need to do any domestic chores. This gave her a chance to devote time to her family. She was always patient with us using common sense rather than intimidation. For instance, I was a poor eater. I expected mother to plead with me to eat, as did some of my friends' mothers. But she never did. She just excused me from the table. I once even accused her of being a "bad mother" for not indulging me, but I soon realized I could not beat Mother in a test of wills. For the rest of my life I gave up being a fussy eater.

It was during the war that I learned more of her subtle ways of rearing us. Coming from a religious background, she kept a kosher home. In one of our conversations, I admitted to her that in secret I had eaten ham in the house. She merrily laughed. She knew it all along, but she looked the other way.

These secret feasts occurred quite often when my brother Abrasha was home. He would buy the ham and let one of us know when and where the feast would take place for the five of us. I still love the juicy taste of wonderfully flavored ham, but it tasted even better in Abrasha's room, behind Mother's back. We were proud of ourselves for being able to fool her. Needless to say, supper did not taste very good on the day of the "ham feast". I usually got excused from the table on those occasions.

Later in life, Mother's skillful use of psychology helped her in working out family differences. She learned how to express dissatisfaction with us without getting angry. She was always available when we needed her. Under her watchful eye, we were growing up among all kinds of people. For that, too , I am grateful to her; She prepared us well for life.

Mother never knew what to expect when father return from a trip. She was tolerant of his whims and occasionally had to shake her head in dismay. Once, Father showed up with a dwarf. Peter must have been about fifty

years old when father met him in the Warsaw circus. Talking to him after the show, Father learned that they were eliminating Peter's act. The dwarf had nowhere to go. Without too much thought, father invited the desponent dwarf to our home. Upon their arrival, Mother shook her head but was understanding. Of course there was room to put up Peter, and he was great fun to be with. Our friends liked his card tricks and laughed at his jokes. Peter was all of four feet tall, with a head too large for his torso. His wrinkeled face always featured a wide smile, and almost everone appreciated his humor.

At our home Peter's main task was to greet guests. In order to help them with their coats and hats, he had to climb up a stool. After kissing the ladies' hands, he walked them to the table in the dining room, telling them jokes on the way to their seat. among people. During Peter's short stay with us, we took him along on several occasions. He enjoyed meeting passersby and an engaging them in conversation. He left our home when the circus had a new job waiting for him. By the time he departed he had a much more optimistic on life, as witnessed by Father who saw him again a few years later.

It is not always easy to get to know one's family in the most comfortable of circumstances and when there is an abundance of comfort. Mother's selflessness became far more obvious during the war when food was scarce. After each of us was given our ration of bread, she made believe that she had eaten hers already. I wondered where the extra piece of bread came from, but hunger made me so selfish that I did not want to know. It was a question of survival. Mother never appeared to be concerned about her own well-being, and never cried in front of us. On the contrary, she always appeared optimistic and nourished us with her hope. She was our pillar of strength which gave us courage to go on.

The Russians invaded Poland and occupied Ostrog. In the early morning we were awakened by the sounds of Russian troops on the march. Through the living room windows we saw the approaching Red Army and heard the footsteps of the military boots that made us aware of a terrifying reality. In search of an answer, we looked at Father. His face was ashen white. He recognized the signals of danger and had to act immediately. Everything that he had was invested in real estate or farming. He had to depart at once, leaving behind all he had worked for, in order to avoid being sent to Siberia, a fate waiting all landowners.

He had worked hard as a young man, starting at the age of 15, and Father was the first one to leave home and mother remained in charge of everything. We worried about her and the danger she would have to face, We wondered also how she would manage without father's support, but as always, she did not complain.

Janet Rogowsky
4 Wagon Wheel Rd.
Mamaroneck, NY 10543
(914) 698-0826 or 698-2458

PART II

CHAPTER I

TRAPPED IN LVOV

The carefee years of my youth ended with the Russian invasion of 1939. Early one morning we were awakened by sound the sound of Russian troops on the march. We saw the approaching Red Army through the living room windows. The rythmic footsteps of their thick army boots drummed into us a frightening new realty - Ostrog was under Russian occupation. We looked to Father, and saw that his face had turned ashen white. His life work of building up land holdings was being trampled with each crunching step of the invaders.

Father had good reason for alarm, remembering World War I's pogroms and the brutality of the Ukrainians. As a landowner, he was afraid that our entire family would be sent to Siberia. Landowner was a dangerous word in the Soviet Union. To the Communists it evoked the crime of worker mistreatment and exploitation, and brought on the punishment of hard labor in Siberia for the landowning family. All that Father had worked for - and his very life - was now being threatened.

In a single night, our situation became urgently critical. Since everything was invested in farming, we did not have the resources to relocate the family. On the other hand, we could not risk ourlife by staying. Many peasants, realizing Father's dire circumstances, came with their hats in their hands to plead with Father to remain here with the family. Father was a good, caring employer and the workers were eager to show their

gratitude. But Father knew that to remain was dangerous, and that in time of war not everyone could be trusted.

The peasants from our estate came all the way from Wilia to offer help. Their faces were lined with disbelief and disappointment when their generous offers were declined. They felt betrayed and distrusted, numbed by the reality that their reliable landlord and patron was in the position of vulnerbility and fear.

Within two days of the Russian invasion Father fled to Lvov, a large city, where he could live under an assumed name. His lawyer and personal friend, Mr. N., lived there and was willing to help. Mr. N. had encouraged Father to leave immediately, without the family. It would be easier to find living quarters if he were alone, and it was virtually impossible to find an apartment at that time. Refugees were arriving from all over the country to hide in Lvov. The only rentals were the resultof the food shortage, with many Polish families supplementing their income by renting out part of their homes. When Father found a room with kitchen privileges for the family, he immediately sent for Mother, my brother, Grisha, and my sister, Asia. I was to remain with my married sister, Asya, and her family, to continue with my schooling in Ostrog and I would be beyond harm because I was young and livingwith a brother-in-law whose work was sanctioned by the occupying Russians. In no time our family's spacious home became the new town hall, and we were ordered by the Russians to move to other, very crowded quarters. From that moment on, I never again saw the home where I spent my childhood years. The struggle to survive had begun and it was to continue until the end of this tragic war.

During the Russian occupation, I could seldom communicate with my family. Although I loved my sister, her husband and their two lovely children I sorely missed my parents. Being without them was a new and frightening experience. Asya generously shared the little food she managed to get for her family. Stanley wwas able to keep his job as an accountant, but the salary was not enough to feed five people. Many of his friends were now unemployed and he couldn't see them hungry in the streets,without sharing some of his meager pay with them. When he got home to his own family, there was Asya, tired and hungry, often lying on the sofa, with her eyes closed clutching her two little ones.

The room we lived in was as grim as the world around us. I never saw Asya crying or complaing. In fact,we rarely broke the silence in that dark, self-absorbed period. We were in a long state of shock. I could picture my sister as she was before 1939, with her sunny disposition and her sympathetic face. Always generous and responsive, Asya was now sadly taciturn and resigned. She was suddenly powerless to help her own children, andthe families of many friends who were even worse off.

This dispair continued through the first two years of the Russian occupation. At that time, my father fearing the potential conflict between Stalin and Hitler, suggested that I come to join the family in Lvov. And so in 1941, a few weeks before Hitler broke the non-aggression pact with Stalin, I joined the family there. Lvov was a cosmopolitan city located nearer to the hub of the Western world than was Ostrog, which remained a more eastern city on the Russian border.

By that time we were in very bad financial circumstances. Food and money was scarce. Earlier mother's jewelry helped to pay rent and buy some food. But this asset did not last too long. We were getting desperate. Thanks to friends from our hometown, we managed to get a hotdog stand. This was difficult for a woman of my mother's sensibilities, but she courageously withstood the emotional and physical stress. This elegant lady, my mother, was now dressed in an old winter coat with a short kerchief covering her wavy hair, and torn socks served as gloves to ward off the bitter cold. I never heard Mother complain.

I was there to help, giving her a chance to warm her hands over a bit of burning coal, that was in short supply. Father continued to explore ways to escape to German occupied territory. As far as he was concerned, nothing could worse than banishment to Siberia. Being afraid to face the Russians, he tried to stay off the streets. Soon Lvov fell to the Germans. A few months later, in December, 1941 walls wentup and a Jewish ghetto was created. We were finally saved from prosecution as capitalists; it was the crime of Jewishness that we now had to deal with.

After being drafted by the retreating Red Army, my oldest brother Abrasha left his friend Regina with us. She had nowhere else to stay. With her Aryan looks she hoped to fool the Germans. She removed her armband with the Star of David, which Jews had to wear at all times, and decided to leave Lvov. The armband regulation was strictly enforced by the Germans,

under the pain of torture and death.. We tried to stop Regina but to no avail. As soon as she left, she was recognized by the Germans and was shot on the spot.

With Regina gone and Abrasha in the Russian army, there were five of us left under the roof of a Polish landlord. He was not pleased with tenants who were such liablities, and clearly showed his displeasure. He now used stronger language to us, feeling more secure with the change of power. The hated Russians were gone. The Germans became his liberators. With the Jews on the bottom of the newly shuffled deck,we were in deep trouble.

The first day after the Nazis captured Lvov, my father was anxious to salvage the remaining food on the hot dog stand which was left on the other side of town. Father was unaware that the radio announced that day as a special holiday for Germany's Ukrainian allies. As a reward they were given permission to take whatever actions they wished against the Jews. It was open season, and the Jews faced another pogrom. When we reached the downtown area, conditions were already violent in the streets. We were caught in the middle of a dreadful scene. Stores were being looted, windows shattered, and Jews dragged out of their homes, to be beaten, humiliated, and made to dance. Everywhere on the streets, people were encircling Jews, shouting, mocking, and jeering them. My father and I were grabbed by two husky Ukrainians. Knowing the language, I begged them to let us go. They kept laughing, pushing and kicking my father while calling him insulting names. After searching Father thoroughly they finally released us. I took my father's hand and we tried to leave the area as fast as possible.

The streets were crowded with terrified people. To return home was dangerous; we could not press our luck. We saw Jews lying in the street, beaten and bloody. We frantically knocked on every door, begging anyone to let us in. Nobody dared to open the door until a Jewish family welcomed us, putting themselves in jeopardy by doing so. They saw us trembling from shock, and forgot their own danger. They tried to make us comfortable.

At five o'clock sharp, the Germans, with their usual efficiency, announced that the unsupervised period was over and that order was to be restored immediately. The pogrom ended as though it were an exercise class. Jews

cautiously came out of hiding and returned home. We were shaken by this first direct encounter with the enemy. We now knew how vulnerable to physcial assaul or murder. Father was right about the Ukrainians. They had lost none of their antipathy for Jews, and now they were the eager deputies of Nazi brutality.

A few days later three Gestapo officers arrived at our apartment to tell Father to report to headquarters for workcamp the next day. My father asked permission to bring along his younger son, Grisha, so that they could be together. After discussing this suggestion among themselves, the officers approved. After they left, Father realized that bringing Grisha along might have been a terrible mistake. Badly needing help and advice, he summoned his lawyer friend who arrived immediately. Although visiting a Jewish family was already dangerous for Christians, Mr. N's friendship outweighed his fear. Learning of the situation, he advised father to flee and leave him with care of the family.

Influential people were in greater danger. The Germans had recently demanded ten Jews to bew held for a large ransom. In a few days the money was delivered, but the "hostages" were killed. The Nazis had never intended to set them free. Mr.N.and my mother continued to argue that the Germans could not be trusted.

CHAPTER 2

FATHER'S DECISION

Father spent the whole night agonizing over his decision. He still had faith that he could work out an arrangement with the Germans. He remembered them as being so civil. Haggard with worry, he finally decided to report for work and not put the family in jeopardy by fleeing. Overnight, my father's appearance had changed. The handsome man of forty-five had become ashen grey. His cheeks were sunken and his hair completely white. Mother pleaded with him to change his mind and run away but he did not listen to her tearful pleas.

When the Germans took away my father and brother, Anya followed the truck. From our room in a building on a small hill, we fearfully watched for my sister's return. She was still a distance away when we heard her scream. We sensed immediately what had happened. When Anya finally returned, she could not utter a sound.

Hysterical and trembling, she eventually told us what happened. She had seen Father and Grisha being led inside a building. Father and son stayed close to each other, pale and scared, lookng straignt ahead like streetwalkers. Neither of them saw her. she waited outside, hoping to see where they would be taken to work, but within a few minutes she heard eleven shots.

Those eleven Jews had come voluntarily in the belief that they would be working nearby and returning home every evening. To describe my reaction to this tragedy is impossible. Father, a tower of strength, would never return to us. Theawareness overwhelmed me. I was drained of emotion too numb to cry. Even Grisha, his devoted son, could not protect him from death.

I still see those three well-mannered Gestapo officers, standing in the middle of our crowded room, smiling at us and apologizing for taking up our time, for inconveniencing us this way.

How could we not see through their polite words. Father must have been grief-stricken to have brought Grisha along. He must have realized in the last moments of his life, what a terrible mistake he had made. He was hoping to work together with Grisha but instead they died together.

My brother, Grisha, so young and full of life, was cut down by German bullets, in his prime. Can anyone comprehend such a terror? Slowly absorbing the horror, I felt my whole body convulse. Mother appeared stronger than any of us trying to calm us down in her embrace. Galvanized by the loss of her husband and her second son, she resolutely decided to call her trusted friend Mr. N. We watched her act decisively as the sole parent of her two younger children. She could not afford to sink into despair when we were left without funds and facing a grim future. After these agonizing losses she was determined to fight to the end.

If Anya and I entertained thoughts of suicide, we immediately discarded

this excruciating option. In spite of all the tragedy we wanted to live. Neither my sister nor I would succumb easily, without defying the enemy. The three of us, my mother, sister, and I, were lonely but desperate to struggle on in memory of Father and Grisha, our dear loved ones whom we had lost forever.

Mother's decision to summon Mr. N for help brought immediate results. Our friend and lawyer came at once. He advised us to disappear quickly and was ready to supply us with all the necessary papers. He feared that our Polish landlord had told the Gestapo about the Jewish family in his apartment. After all nobody else knew our address. With his passionate hatred for the Russians the landlord probably resented that Anya "collaberated" by teaching elementary school during the Russian occupation. Mr.N. was concerned about the rumors that all Jews would be expelled and relocated into a single ghetto,

With our two men gone, we took the lawyer's advice and fled the apartment. We went to the Zussmans, old friends from Ostrog, who were willing to share their tiny apartment with us. They, too had come to Lvov believing that the Germans would be more civilized occupiers than the Russians who were so close to Ostrog. Since the Zussman's apartment was located beyond the proposed ghetto, Mr. N. could continue to see us. This was important, because he was our trusted lifeline to the outside world. Mr. N. was a frequent visitor to our Ostrog home before the war; now our friendship proved to be a lifesaver.

CHAPTER THREE

PERILS WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE GHETTO WALLS

The Zussmans appeared out of immediate danger, but they had also suffered losses. Their eldest son was taken away by the Germans. They depended on their two younger sons, who worked to support the family. Because their apartment was beyond the ghetto, they could have brought in much money by renting out the room. We had no funds, but this did not prevent them from giving us refuge. We shared bread and some few other foods with the Zussmans, and we provided each other with comfort. One day, the older remaing son disappeared and the family never heard from

him again. Each new tragedy reopened our fresh wound

The crowded conditions of the Zussmans'two room apartment occasionally caused tension. There were only two beds and a sofa for seven of us. The elder Zussmans had a small room to themselves. The other room had a sofa where their son, Michael, and his girlfriend slept. Mother, Anya and I shared a bed that was meant for one. We tried different sleeping positions including head to foot but we could never get comfortable. In the morning we all rushed to wash using the well water that we had brought up the previous evening.

In these conditions I developed a finger infection which caused me a great deal of pain. Finding someone to treat it was a problem, since all Jewish doctors were confined to the ghetto and it was forbidden for Aryan doctors to help Jews. Mr. N. found one who agreed to see me secretly at his home. In order to avoid detection I had to promise not to utter a sound during the surgery. As pain killers were not available, I had to suffer in silence.

A few days later I noticed a large abscess on my leg which was swelling rapidly. I needed medical attention immediately. Once more our good friend, Mr. N., found me a doctor, who treated my leg even though he had anti-Semitic neighbors who would have turned him into the Gestapo. Even in those terrible times there were doctors who lived up to their oath to help all people.

The Zussmans' youngest son, Michael, was now their only remaining child. Believing that the job would would help him protect his parentshe he signed up for the Jewish militia. No one suspected that even the Jewish police would fall prey to the Germans; it was just a question of time. Michael trying to postpone the inevitable, for as long as possible hoping the war would end before things got too bad.

But Michael's position in the force could neither save his two brothers nor find out about their fate. Every night, he came home he looking depressed. He refused to talk about his daily activities and we did not ask him any questions. Talkative in the past, Michael became withdrawn. Far from being a source of Jewish empowerment, he slowly realized that the Jewish police had become a tool for the Germans.

There were rumors about the harsh treatment of the Jewish police in the Warsaw ghetto, which had been sealed off from the outside world since November 15, 1940. The Germans held them responsible for all underground activities taking place inside the ghetto. In spite of the pressure on the police to prevent these transactions, smuggling continued. Aryans brought in food and demanded exhorbitant prices. Those Jews who could afford it were willing to pay almost any price to supplement their starvation quota of daily bread, to stave off hunger and disease.

One morning the S.S. asked for 10 Jewish policemen to report to their headquarters. Since the Germans requested 30 to 40 men every month to help them keep order, this request did not seem unusual. Only nine policmen appeared, as the tenth one received a tip not to report.To take his place the SS picked another name from their file and made him come in. The10 men were promptly arrested, accused of ignoring smuggling activities. Two days later all 10 were led to a public execution in front of the prison. They walked silently to their designated places on the pockmarked wall. The orders were given and the Polish firing squad took aim and commenced shooting.

The scene was visible to hundreds of people. While the noise of the rifles was loud, nothing could compare with the screaming and crying of mothers, wives and children of the victims and the crowd of witnesses. Amid the din of wailing, one hysterical woman named Ita, the wife of the tenth executed policeman, jumped to her death from a third floor balcony her two year old baby in her arms.

The Nazis, early on, set up a Jewish Council(Judenrat) in each ghetto. Their many administrative functions included the creation of a Jewish police force (unarmed, of course) to maintain order and carry out directives. It was understood that the Council would represent the community and speak for its citizens. What the Germans really wanted, however, was the collaboration Jewish leadership in their own orderly and systematic extermination.

In May of 1992, pubic television presented a provative film , *The Lodz Ghetto.* It documented the many complex details and issues of Nazi control of the ghettos and their use of the Judenrat to further their aims. The situation in the Lodz ghetto was similar to others. Lodz, an industrial city, had the second largest concentration of Jews in Poland after

Warsaw. The Lodz ghetto film was based on extensive diaries written by Jews in the ghetto to record their frustrations and inhuman treatment by their German "masters of life and death". In this film, one can follow the many functions of the Judenrat in the ghetto. The emcompassing ghetto wall was the powerful symbol of Jewish isolation, and the thick electric wires atop them were a reminder of the deadly consequences of escape.

In the Lodz ghetto, like many others throughout Poland, the Jewish Council soon came to understand their extremely difficult task: they would supervise the distribution of the meager food supply and register Jews for "ressetlement selection". The Jewish police, who played a major role in rounding up the selected Jews for their deportation, was under the Judenrat's command. The head of the Council was the link between the Germans and their victims. In the beginning, the Lodz Judenrat honestly believed that by collaborating with the Nazis and assuming maximum local control he would be able to save a great number of Jews. Whenever he was asked to submit a segment of the population for deportation, he did so. He rejected those "viscious rumors" that the deportees were headed for extermination.

He was there to protect his wards, and certainly, he reasoned, it was better that Jews, rather than Nazis deliver their quotas of people. When the Nazi demands for Jewish children and elderly reached into the many hundreds, however, eve nthe Council president began to have doubts about his authority to send off so many Jews who were obviously not part of any labor force. In ghettos other than Lodz, members of the Jewish Council saw the terrible trap they were in and coped with it by commiting suicide rather than sending others to their death.

By I944, when the masses of Jews had been evacuated from the Lodz ghetto, it was known that"resettled" people never returned. Although they were not certain of their ultimate fate, they felt trapped. They lost faith in their community leader and showed contempt for him. In the end, the film shows that even the president of the Council was sent to Auschwitz with his family. To make the president feel more important, the Germans gave him a separate compartment in the cattlecars to the death camp cremetorium.

Returning to our own experience with the Nazi program of dehumanization and annihilation, every day brought new fears about our ultimate fate. We were paralyzed with indecision, only able to silently pace the apartment. By now, our immediate family had shrunk from ten down to three. Mother, Anya, and I in spite of our tragic losses did not spend much time mourning. We were determined to survive. Since jobless people were subject to deportation, our most challenging goal was to get working papers. We no longer hadfaith in day time work camps, as no one was coming back from them. We feared that these workers were simply being murdered.

With help of friends from Ostrog, who were part of the Jewish Council, Anya and I succeeded in obtaining working papers in the beginning of 1942. With the two of us employed, Mother was given permission to remain at home and take care of us. For the moment we were a step ahead of deportation and could stay together, but conditions were getting worse. We heard all kinds of rumors and everyone was gripped with fear. Even those of us who worked, suspected a coming catastrophe, and we had good reason. Our job was to take apart worn clothing for the production of paper. Some of the clothes was stained with blood, and, in the pockets, we sometimes found notes signed with Jewish names. These notes were meant for loved ones, either saying good-bye or indicating that their life was in danger. It was heartbreaking to read these messages, especially when we saw names that we knew. It was obvious that these Jews were in mortal danger.

CHAPTER FOUR

ORPHANED OF MOTHER

At that time we did not know that soon after the invasion of Poland, masses of German Jews were deported to Poland for Hitler's "final solution" of the Jewish problem.. The death camps had begun to function in

high gear. One morning, early in 1942 the radio announced that all women between the ages of 35 and 45 would be taken to work assignment that day. Having heard the announcement, my sister left work to be with Mother, to make sure that the Gestapo respected her permit issued by the Jewish Council, to remain at home. But Anya came too late. The apartment door was left wide open and Mother was nowhere to be seen. The Gestapo had taken her.

The Zussmans had gone a few days earlier and we never heard from them again. Their son, Michael the policeman, also disappeared soon afterwards and could not provide us with any information. We did hear what happened from a neighbor who had come to find out whether Mother heard the announcement. The neighbor heard the sound of boots and loud voices, so she hid under the sofa and only came out of hiding when the Germans had left She told Anya what happened: Two S.S. men rushed into the room and grabbed Mother. She tried to show them her permit to stay at home but the Nazis didn't care. After screaming at Mother and kicking her with their well polished boots, the Germans savagely pushed her down four fights of stairs. The neighbor followed the procession of deportees from a distance saw them being pushed into a cattle wagon filled with hundreds women. The women were driven to a central transportation point with other large groups of women. A Jewish policeman I knew, described the scene that took place there. For 48 hours the women were ordered to stand at attention, not allowed to sit or bend under a torrential rain. Those who disobeyed were beaten. Many were screaming or sobbing, and some of them lost their mind. Scores were shot on the spot for being noisy or disobedient. From this hellish scene the women were packed into a long cattlecar train and shipped to the extermination camp of Belzec.

There are no surviving witnesses to Mother's last moments in Belzec, but the scene could be reconstructed with the help of books like Milton Meltzer book entitled NEVER TO FORGET. Belzec was a death camp where mass extermination then used carbon monoxide. According to the recorded testimony of S.S. First Lieutenant Kurt Gerstein, early that morning he saw a train of 45 cars arriving. Of the 6,700 pieces of crammed human cargo,1450 were already dead on arrival . . . when the train stopped, Ukrainian guards tore open the doors and whipped the people onto the platform. All had to strip naked and give up their clothes, shoes, valuables, spectacles, artificial limbs and their hair. . . . They all walked the path all naked, men, women and children. . . . Mothers with their babies

at their breast, hesitated and entered the death chambers. The chambers filled . . . .

After 32 minutes everyone was dead.*

*(Milton Meltzer, NEVER TO FORGET, pp. 142-144

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THE ARYAN WORLD

With Mother gone, we knew that the same fate awaited us if we remained. Determined to survive, we asked Mr. N. to help us acquire false documents. When we received the Christian identity papers in February of the same year, we decided to leave for Germany, where young Polish workers were needed. It was too dangerous to remain in Poland.

I had not dreamt about my father since he left us, but that night , when escape from Poland first became possible, I saw a clear vision of his pale face on a stormy ocean, pushing away huge waves. In a loud voice he was telling me not to go to Germany with Anya. He was trying to hold me back. When I awoke, I told Anya about my dream and my decision not to leave for Germany. Anya was not very pleased, without uttering a word, she took off Star of David band and left.

All I had left was my new identity. I walked out of the apartment for the last time and began to search for a place to hide. I memorized the name of the village that Anya intended to reach and hoped to find her. At that time the German-Polish border was heavily patrolled by the Nazis. Crossing it was risky, yet Anya decided to take a chance. When she reached the border, she showed her papers to the Polish customs officer. He questioned my sister and she knew that he did not believe her story. However, instead of arresting Anya he returned her papers and sent her through wishing her good luck. Here was a rare, decent man who wanted to help. Anya was able to cross the border into German territory.

As for me, I was fearful of being recognized without the armband during the day. I desperately needed a place to hide until dark. The Gestapo was looking all over for escaping Jews. Even the steamy saunas, where many

Jews hid, were not good hiding places any longer. The Germans had discovered that trick. I had to get off the streets. A stranger, that I approached, told me about a small bed and breakfast place, and, trusting him, I went to look for it. I thought he was being helpful, but within a few minutes he arrived there presenting his S.S. badge. He asked for my papers and carefully looked them over. He seemed to be satisfied. Before leaving , he cheerfully invited me for a cup of coffee. We arranged to meet in a half hour, giving me the time I needed to collect my thoughts.

I suspected that he did not believe me and I was frightened that he would take me to the Gestapo. The coffee might well be a trick. As soon as he left, the landlady opened the door and confirmed my suspicion. The agent had told her that she was hiding a Jewess. . To cover up my fear, I laughed and nonchalantly told her that I was going down for a newspaper. After putting on an extra sweater, grabbing my prayer book and my few remaining zlotys, I turned the corner and then started running without looking back.

I was soon lost in a hostile town, without a friend or a plan. My hope was to find a forest or a cemetery, somewhere I could hide for a few hours before running when darkness fell. I saw a railroad station nearby and rushed there. But this was a big mistake. When the ticket clerk asked me where I wanted to go, I lost my composure and replied that I was ready to go anywhere. He told me that there was no train until the next day. Hearing the bad news I became panicky. To remain at the station was a very poor idea. This was one of the places the Gestapo watched carefully and often picked up fugitives. It was too dangerous to remain there so I begged an old coachman to drive me out of town. He recognized my fear and despair and agreed to comply with my request for the pittance of money I was carrying. I can still see this toothless, old man staring at me with his fixed smile.

As soon as we left town, he climbed over to me in the back seat, and invitedg me to stay at his friend's empty hut for the day. Still terrified, I was too jittery to reply. I remained silent, thinking of my next step. I felt forlorn and confused. My chances to see Anya again in the village where she was hiding seemed more remote than ever. I heard the coachman explain that his friend let him stay in the hut during his absence. This enabled him to rest for a few hours whenever he was carrying a passenger and also to feed and rest his horse, which otherwise might have broken

down from the strenuous ride on the unpaved country roads. The coachman jumped down from the carriage and, with a big, toothless grin told me to wait while he made sure that nobody was at home.

Luckily, the entrance to the hut was in the rear. This gave me one last opportunity to escape.I was on the run again. I couldn't trust strangers anymore. I needed my sister badly, although I knew that I had no right to impose on her, after refusing to go with her in the first place. I was determined to reach her. The most important thing was to avoid populated areas. Finally arriving in a forest and feeling totally exhausted, I fell asleep under a tree. I was awakened in the morning by a tall man staring down at me. Hungry, cold and stunned I remained motionless, without uttering a single word. I was too exhausted to think, but I sensed that he meant me no harm.

He was soft spoken and went out of his way to help me. I don't know whether he suspected I was Jewish. After all, Polish girls also had a hard time finding a job and were looking for work everywhere. Poland was already under occupation for three years and people were frustrated with the constant shortage of food and clothing. Many of the young people tried to escape to Germany. I explained to him that I needed a job. He listened but did not ask me any questions. I learned from him that I was not far from the Anya's village I was looking for. He suggested that I look for work at the local estate, the largest employer in the area. He seemed to know this part of the country very well and that made me think that he was a Polish partisan who was aslso in hiding. I never learned his name or anything about this man. I just recall a tall silhoutte with a kind face who who met me at dawn, deep in the woods, far from any other human being. He gave me directions to the estate he mentioned before we parted.

.The incident is more frightening to me in retrospect than it was at the time. This brief encounter renewed my hope and gave me the strength to go on. When I arrived at Anya's village after 10 days of wandering, I quickly found out where she lived because it was a very small place. The villagers were told that a Polish girl stopped at their neighbor's little hut on her way to Germany. I went directly there pulling myself together before surprising her with my arrival. I knocked on the door. Anya was sitting at a table close to her landlady. Nobody else was in the hut. The room where I found her was small with a low ceiling and sparse furniture.

I figured that anyone who risked providing her with lodging must be a good person. Meeting the landlady, I felt that Anya was safe here. I greeted them with the customary "Glory to Jesus" and they both answered "Forever and ever, Amen". My sister, sitting very still, showed no emotion, no sign of having recognized me. I explained to the landlady that I was on my way to another village and needed a short rest. She offered me some food. After she left the room, my sister and I started to cry. But we quickly realized that this was no time for self pity and that I had to leave immediately before endangering both our lives. Two girls together would certainly attract the villagers' attention. Until she had a chance to cross the Polish border, my sister was staying with this kind woman. However, Anya's first stop, on the way to Germany, had been the home of the high school principal in this village.

Before leaving for Germany, Anya met some Polish girls who were looking for work and were eager to leave the country. They knew of a man who provided shelter for a short period of time and those girls intended to stop off at his home on their way to Germany. Anya had memorized his name and the village where he lived. With her characteristic courage she went to his place on her own. Without asking too many questions, he agreed to let her remain for a few days. Unfortunately, the man's neighbors soon suspected him of hiding a Jewess and the school principal provided another place for her. If the Gestapo had found Anya at his home, they would have hanged him in the village square as a lesson to all.

By the time I tried to find my sister at the principal's home, she had already left for a safer place. This is how I found her in the modest peasant's hut where she would remain until a transport of Polish workers was ready to leave for Germany. Anya assured me of her landlady's generosity. She shared what little food she had and was willing to shelter Anya until her imminent border crossing.

This gentle woman offering refuge, did not show any anxiety. On the contrary, she was confident that Anya would have the opportunity to leave very shortly. This ordeal lasted a few weeks. Months later I learned from Mr. N. about Anya's safe border crossing into Germany. We both promised to stay in touch Mr.N., but we soon abandoned this idea for fear of jeopardizing our friend's life. Christians were not allowed to communicate with Jews. Mr. N. took a chance when he got my address, by writing me about Anya.

German farmers badly needed workers so Anya volunteered to do farm work. She was hired to milk cows, work in the fields and help with housework. As she told me after the war, she had a serious problem in the beginning with the cows' tails constantly in her eyes. Having never done farm work, she found it difficult to do her assigned chores. But she realized that hard physical work on a small farm was much safer than being in a large city full of Nazis.

The German family liked her and treated her well. She got along with them and quickly improved her German. One woman gave her trouble, however. Everyone considered the woman to be "crazy" and nobody paid attention to her. She kept running in the streets singing in a loud voice "Anya is a Jude" Fortunately the neighbors simply laughed at her - and so did Anya.

CHAPTER SIX

HAVEN AT THE MAJOR'S ESTATE

After that initial hour with my sister, I was only able to stay in touch through Mr. N. Having to go my own way, I proceeded to look for the estate that I heard about from the man in the forest. Anya had known about this estate too. It was run by an Austrian major. According to those who knew him, he was a charitable man, who opposed the Germans and befriended many Austrian Jews. Before the war some Jewish friends used to come to his estate for vacation. Upon arriving at his home, I was granted an interview with the Major. He hired me as a tutor for his grandson and as a helper in the kitchen.

My worst problem was with his personal secretary, a former Polish officer, who did not like Jews. Luckily, he did not suspect my identity and even made disparaging remarks about Jews in my presence. Neverthless, this place was relatively like heaven for me. I had food, a cot in the kitchen, people who accepted me and a friendly twelve year old boy to be with.

The atmosphere was tense in the kitchen. Marysia, the cook, was quite tempermental, although basically good natured. We got along most of the

time. One day the Major was entertaining a group of Gestapo officers. To cover my fear, I offered to prepare the potatos for dinner. The result was a disaster. I had no idea that potatoes were not cooked like spaghetti, so I rinsed them in cold water. Marysia lost her temper, because dinner was to be served soon. Thanks to some nearby witnesses I was spared a good beating. I did not express any fear. I stood up to her. Marysia was taken back, but it seemed to me that I gained her respect.

I did not know whether any Jews lived in the area and did not ask. Occassionally I would see a group of Jews prisoners being led by Gestapo guards. The prisoners' faces were full of agony, dispair and hopelessness. I wondered whether they were destined for work, deportation to a bigger center, or transferred to a concentration camp. I never found out, but the destination did not really matter.The result was the same: starvation, torture and death. One morning the servants notified me that the Polish policeman named Andrew, was coming to check my papers. This was the worst news for me. I knew Andrew. He often used to visit the workers. His reputation for cruelty was well known. Andrew enjoyed his job. Humiliation, torture and rape often preceded the killing of his victims.

I froze with fear, but showed no emotion when he came over to me. He asked for my documents, checked them over, and then he patted my cheek with the same hand that sadistically killed others. Satisfied, he walked out.telling the servants in the kitchen that I was a nice girl and he did not care who I really might be. But I worried. Was this statement just a ruse? Who was collaborating with him and what would he do next? I wondered how much time I had and whether I still had a chance to survive.

I wanted to make sure that I had my co-workers on my side; that they would not turn against me. After considerable thought, I had an idea. As loyal Polish patriots, my coworkers always listened to foreign news on a hidden radio. This was against the law, a crime punishable by death. When I suddenly opened the door, where they gathered clandestinely to hear the broadcasts, they were startled and alarmed with fear. I assured them that I would not say anything to anyone, but now they too had something to worry about. We now had a tacit agreement to remain silent.

The Major lived on his estate with his wife, his Polish daughter-in-law and her son, Janek. The Major was a dignified man ofAustrian background, who was accepted by the Poles in spite of the war. The villagers

remembered him from the pre-war years, when he divided his time between Austria and Poland. They treated him with respect and considered him a good employer. The family led a quiet life staying home most of the time, listening to music or reading. The family kept to themselves. I never saw the Major's son, Janek's father. He was never mentioned. I was told by the workers that he was in the army, but I could not figure out on whose side he was fighting on. The relationship between the Major and his daughter-in-law was cordial, but restrained. I did not know whether the war was a factor. The grandfather loved Janek but he found the boy too dependent on his mother.

I was one of the few workers who had the right to cross the threshhold into the family's private quarters. The Major made me comfortable in his company and at ease with his wife. My main task was to spend time with Janek and, occassionally to help with domestic chores. Because the Major was in charge of domestic affairs, including dinners and daily menus, he dealt directly with the housekeeper, Danusia, who was a young, attractive woman, in her thirties. With her quick smile, blond hair, hazel eyes and peaches and cream complexion, she personified a Polish country girl. Danusia did not have much education, but she showed good common sense.

I do not know how long she had been employed by the Major, but it was evident that he sought her advice in managing the household. She was devoted to him and the family, never sharing any information about them with anyone. Danusia had complete access to their private quarters, and was the only link between the boss and the domestic help. Although the Major was very gentle with everyone, he openly showed affection for Danusia. Her family lived in the village nearby but she seldom left the estate. Her mother would occasionally pay a visit and join us in the kitchen some evenings.

Danusia's private room was an indication of her importance, while even Marysia, the cook, slept on a cot in the kitchen as I did. Whenever Danusia went to church, I would join her. Sometimes, after services we would stop off at her family's hut. Her home was one of the few that I visited. I tried not to be conspicuous in the village. Nobody else lived on the estate but for the farm manager, an accountant and the Major's personal secretary. These three men also had private rooms like Danusia. Her older brother, Stefan, used to supervise the field workers and often, after seeing the Major, would join us in the kitchen for a brief conversation before

returning home.

Stefan knew more about politics than the others. He had the courage to listen to foreign news while at the estate, and to mention when Jewish fugitives in the woods were killed by Polish partisans. I often wondered whether he deliberately made such comments in my presence to warn me about the existing danger. Stefan was respectful to me and I thought I could trust him in case of trouble. All the other estate workers lived in the village and would return home after a day's labor.

This estate was quite different from my family's in Wilia. It was much smaller, more seclusive, and there was less contact with the working people. Our peasants seemed more energetic, quicker in their tasks and louder. My father and my two brothers were with the staff in the fields most of the time. I never saw the Major talking to his field workers. Back at Wilia we were glad to see our people and the house was always full of noise and laughter. Here, on the other hand, life was quiet and restrained. Janek, a beautiful child, was far too serious and lonely for a boy. He did not have any friends . Always on his best behavior, he clung to his mother for company. The evenings, too, were quiet. At the estate I never heard people singing as they used to do in Wilia. Although our peasants were less sophisticated, I appreciated their folk wisdom and sincere devotion to us.

Since the Major was the only wealthy Austrian in the area, he often entertained German officers. I was usually there to serve them. Serving dinner at the table where the members of the Gestapo were seated, was a nightmare. They often came in small groups, dressed in well-tailored uniforms, and shiny black boots. Their laughter could be heard from a distance as they approached the house. As they neared, nothing frightened me more than those highly polished black boots, which kicked and humiliated my relatives and countless other victims. The cadence of their walk was scary too. Those boots stumped the ground with the finality of death.

I recall an incident in Lvov, when we still lived with the Zussmans. The Germans shut off the running water in our building and we were forced to use the well across the street. After work I would grab a bucket to bring water for the evening. It was forbidden to walk out without the band with the Star of David but one time I forgot to wear it. As soon as I began

pumping the water, I realized what I had forgotten. But at the same time I saw a pair of highly polished black boots approaching me and heard that same determined step. I froze up and I stopped the pump, expecting the boots to stomp out my life. But miraculously the boots rhythmically passed right by me. Even today, when I see a man in uniform, I chill to the memory of those boots,

The Gestapo dinner at the estate often lasted about three to four hours. The atmosphere was congenial. Neither the Major's wife nor his daughter-in-law was ever present. Danusia and I brought in all the food from the kitchen which was located at the other end of the long hall that linked the two wings of the house. Danusia served at the table and I tried to keep a distance from the Gestapo. The guests enjoyed the food and did not bother to look at us.

Among them was one, whose face I shall never forget. He came for dinner with other German officers toward the end of the war. During his visit he asked me to accompany him for a walk. As we walked arm in arm, he talked about his family and showed me a picture of his only son, whom he greatly missed. He was so caring and warm that I wondered whether he suspected my true identity. This fatherly man told me that I reminded him of his son, who also needed a father. How did he know that I was away from my family? What did he know about my background? He continued to talk about the war and its cruelty. As I listened to him, I wondered: did he too have Jewish friends in Germany as did the Major?

I did not think that this would be the last time I would see German soldiers in this house. I had no idea that the Russians were rapidly advancing. The Germans were still claiming victory. But as the war progressed, the Major and his wife became even less visible. When he called me in he seemed restless and nervous. This kind man was in trouble and I could not help him in any way. The situation was dangerous and he could not remain on his estate. As an Austrian, the Major was considered an enemy. The Russians would have imprisoned him and his family. While talking to him, I heard suitcases opening and closing. There was sound of whispering in the other rooms. The Major had not been highly visible in the past and now he was nowhere to be seen.

I went on with my daily chores. During the day I continued studying

German with hs grandson, Janek. From an elementary textbook we learned to speak and write German. His mother tongue was Polish. This was the best part of my day. Janek did not present any danger. He was respectful and enjoyed learning. In the evening I continued entertaining the servants with fortune telling, that I had learned from a book. I was lucky in most of my predictions. Naturally, I heard some gossip beforehand. The people were happy to hear what the future held for them. They praised my wisdom and I made them smile. They did not have many diversions besides going to church and occasional visits to relatives.

I even ventured a few visits myself. These people worked hard, and lived in modest thatched houses that they kept them clean and bright. They were hospitable and generous with their food. At the estate, after work, I used to spend time talking to them about my native area. They were far from the Polish-Russian border and knew very little about the Russians. Even young people did not travel. Many of them were hoping that I would remain with them forever and become part of their village.

Most of the younger ones could not afford to continue with higher education and were destined to work either on a farm or for the Major. Some of the workers had a small parcel of land that they cultivated, growing vegetables for their own needs. Some kept a cow or two and sold milk in the village. Summer was the most enjoyable time of the year. They could be outdoors, riding a bicycle, swimming or playing ball. I tried to keep busy but at night, when memory intruded, it became unbearable for me. Stiffling sobs was difficult and my roommate, Marysia, would not have tolerated the disturbance. I hardly breathed under the cover looking forward to the morning and some good news.

Thinking about the tragic conditions of that time, I could not imagine the end of the war. I had little information about what was happening in the larger war-torn Europe. Those around me were tense with fear and anxiety.

Our last encounter with the Major was a very sad one. When I looked at this elderly man I felt great pity for him and his family. I knew that he was in trouble. In spite of his kind deeds, the Russians would be merciless to this "fascist capitalist". Her had saved my life and now I could not help him. I had a feeling that he wanted me to join his family, hoping that I could be helpful to them.

I remained at the estate, waiting for the Russians, my liberators. Contrary to what my father thought, I believed that they would be more humane than the Nazis. I expressed such to the Major while looking straight at him. I thanked him for keeping me on his estate. I did indicate, however, that I would be ready to leave with his family if I could be of any use to them. After shaking my hand, and granting me a warm "God bless you", he left in a hurry. I never saw him again. The Major stayed on for another two weeks before fleeing further west.

During this interim time, life became unbearable. Constant fear was my daily companion. I never got into any discussions with the workers, but from time to time I overheard news about German military losses. Because they did not know what to expect, the workers were not happy about the Russians' advance. Only on rare occasions did I dare to regain hope for my survival.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LIBERATION

One day, Danusia told me that the Major and his family were gone. She suggested I come stay with her. The Russians were winning the war and the Germans had retreated from the area. The news came to me in one simple statement. I was overwhelmed and bewildered. As far as I knew there were no Jews in the entire area. Out of fear, I continued to maintain my Christian identity and to restrain my emotions. I was cautiousnever to reveal anything about myself.

Danusia never asked me any questions about my past. As head of the domestic staff and the Major's favorite, she could have made things difficult for me. She treated me much better than the other domestics, however, and seemed to enjoy my company. Although I slept in the kitchen, she made it clear that I could use her bedroom whenever I wished. Others did not have this privilege. She listened carefully to what I said and respected my opinion. Danusia had a strong urge to learn about Poland and I was a good source of information for her. Her invitation was therefore,

not a surprise. Many times in the past she had suggested that I continue to live in her village after the war. She never tried to pry into my past or to find out why I was often so sad. Her offer of hospitality diminished my lonliness, and I cheerfully accepted it.

Danusia and I arrived at her home in the afternoon and, at 4 a.m. two Russian soldiers from a reconnaissance unit knocked on the window, close to my bed. When I saw them my heart stopped beating. They had come to me, the Russian speaking girl, they had been told about, and I was glad to tell them everything I knew about the Germans.

The Germans were gone but these soldiers came to make sure that the enemy had left for good. I was deliriously happy to see them and both assured me that I was safe and free! One of the soldiers was Jewish, and he confirmed that I was the first Jewish person he had encountered in the immediate area. They embraced me and tried to stop my sobbing. They even offered to take me along with them in case I was still afraid to remain in the village.

When I spoke to the soldiers in Russian, Danusia did not understand what was being said. This time she was more nervous than I, but I kept reassuring her that the soldiers would not hurt either of us. I explained the reason for their presence in our cottage. Not to upset her, I did not mention their offer to take me along and just assured her excitedly that we were free of German occupation.

The Russians were winning the war, but I felt physically and emotionally drained. My whole body was aching. I was overwhelmed with this new situation and felt the strain of my years of tension as never before. How would I manage to survive victory? All my deeply buried anxieties now welled up to the surface. I wondered whether this was just a dream. I was also eager to share this news with someone I loved. I did not know anything about the fate of my family.

While I was suddenly free to move about, I was not prepared to jump into the unkown. I was grateful to the Russians for ending the Nazi menace, but I was very confused about the world I was going to face. I explained to Danusia that I had a wonderful friend, Mr. N., whom I was eager to see. I wrote to notifying him about my survival. Despite the still dangerous traveling conditions, my good friend came immediately to take me to his

home, without even letting me know that he was coming. He was not going to waste any time nor did he want to take any chances by leaving me alone. His wife, Zosia, was expecting me in Lvov. My co-workers, especially Danusia, were reluctant to see me leave and pleaded with my friend to allow me to stay for awhile. Mr. N. was adamant; he insisted that I had suffered enough and needed a change. It became obvious to me that Danusia suspected all along my true identity; the conversation between Mr.N.and Danusia clearly indicated it.

I did not participate in the discussion. Sitting next to Mr. N., I was speechless. Danusia was very emotional. She tried to convince my good friend that during the war we worked hard and had no leisure time. She was looking forward to my staying at her home and would be disappointed to see me leave so soon. Mr. N. feared my traveling unprotected. The western part of Poland was was raging with warfare. . Nobody knew what the outcome would be.

. It was difficult to leave this group of people who had protected me from danger, but I had a task in front of me: to find anyone in my family who survived. When I arrived in Lvov with Mr. N. , his wife, Zosia, welcomed me with open arms. The two of them had not heard from any of my relatives. It appeared that I might be the only survivor. Although the economy was bad and food was scarce, my new family shared everthing with me. Zosia worked as a nurse, Mr. N. worked occasionally in a law firm, earning little money. They never made me feel that it was difficult to feed another person. Just the opposite, they acted graciously, not showing any sacrifice in giving up some food for me. This was lesser sacrifice for them than all of those other times when they risked their lives for us.

A Polish nurse, named Irene Opdyke, who rescued 12 Jews, tells us in her testimony in the film RESCURERS OF THE HOLOCAUST(MOMA, 1992), about the punishment for saving Jewish lives.
"One day the Germans forced many Poles to go to the market place and watch while they hanged a Polish couple and their two children" [1] The Germans discovered that this couple was hiding Jews. This did not discourage Mr. N. then, and now, he and his wife continued to stand by me. Instead of making me work, they insisted that I should continue with my education. Since the Russians were giving stipends to all those who were enrolled at the university. I felt very comfortable with my new family

until the references to my converting to Christianity. They meant well, saying that I had suffered enough and that the "Jewish problem" would never disappear.

The nuns were prepared to teach me about my new religion. Although I loved my friends and generally respected their wisdom, conversion did not apppeal to me. For my parents' sake I could not have converted no matter what the circumstances were. We never spoke about the matter again and my hosts were understanding.
[1] **Rescuers of the Holocaust**, MOMA 1992]

My new home was a peaceful, warm haven for me. When I decided to look for relatives, Mr. N.and Zosia were sympathtic and helpful. It was at this time that I found my cousin, Genia, who was still in hiding back in Ostrog and still afraid to come out of hiding. She finally agreed to come stay with me in Lvov with Mr. N's approval. As far as knew, she was the only member of the family to survive.

As though I was still with the Austrian major, I continued to limit mycommunication and kept my assumed Christian idenity. It was less dangerous for everybody involved. The liberation of Lvov made me free, but the war was far from over. Under my pseudonym, I attended medical school while taking high school courses required for matriculation. Students, like myself, who did not have a high school diploma were now allowed to make up missed courses. In school I did not find any Jewish names and I thought there were none left. I became friends with three girls and as we were drawn closer to each other in the months that followed we realized that all four of us were Jewish.

It took awhile before our awareness led to a dramatic confessions. We were observing each other for some time each trying to guess the other's identity. As we later confessed, we all had an intuitive feeling that we were not telling the truth. We were enigmatic about our families, and did not reveal our addresses. We were overly cautious when talking about the war. Theother students were more gregarious and happy. The four of us seldom looked into each other's eyes. It was obvious to us that we were hiding something. At the end we pointed out those hints that confirmed our suspicions. All of us had survived as Christians, and we were not ready to talk about the past.

We also were all separated from our families and were then preoccupied with finding relatives. We all did not want to indulge in our horrifying memories, so we became immersed in our studies instead. Parts of Poland were gripped in war and we still felt the economic pressures of the conflict. The four of us kept together until my departure for Warsaw.

Realizing that other Jews also survived, I was determined to start the search for my family.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOME IS JUST A MEMORY

My first Trip was to my hometown of Ostrog, where some friends and relatives remained for the duration of the war. The journey was a difficult one. Trains were not running, coachmen were hard to find, and the roads were not fit for cars. Nonetheless, I was determined to find a way to get there. I finally managed to join a small group of people riding in a tow horse cart. During the I0 hour trip, we had to stop many times, to feed the horses and ease our aching our bodiesfrom the long ride on the rough roads. We saw very few people during our trip, but the faces of those we passed, told a sad story. Their eyes looked vacant, their clothing was tattered and they seemed to have no destination. They were not communicative in the least.

Arriving at my hometown was an even more devastating experience for me. The town was a mass of brick ,wood and concrete rubble. It was impossible to find my parents' house which, I was told, had remained intact. Ostrog was a ghost town. Streets had disappeared, houses were in shambles,and there were no shops were in sight. Although I was eager to see my childhood home, I did not have the courage to go there. The house still existed, but it was no longer my home, where I had spent my carefree and happy years. It had became an official government building. I could not bear to see it.

After the terrifying experiences of struggling for my daily survival, I was not prepared to see the shell of the home where I had lived a beautiful and happy childhood. I did not want to see the changes that the Russians and the Germans had made Later on, my friend Dorothy, who was married

there, described the place in simple words: "You would not have recognized it; it was not the same house."

I was spared the experience of seeing the transformation of our home, but I did accomplish something in Ostrog. I found my cousin Genia, who lived in our house before the war. I took her along with me to Lvov, to share lodging, food and clothing including the only pair of shoes that I owned. She had survived. by being locked up in the basement of a Polish family. She was not allowed to go out, because there were neighbors around who could not be trusted. She had only one small window to see a bit of the outside world. Her constant peering out of that window left her pupils bulging. Pervasive fear had also distorted the pretty face she once had. Genia refused to believe that the war was over and was reluctant to leave with me. Her father was shot in the town's first Jewish roundup and massacre, her mother in the second one.

Jews in Ostrog quickly realized that they would all be killed like those in neighboring ghettos. It was only a question of time. When a large crowd was being herded to their mass execution, my aunt begged her daughter to run away. When Genia finally agreed to make a run for it, a Nazi fired his rifle at the running girl. Genia fell, stunned but not shot, and the German assuming she was dead, went back to guarding the thousands of Jews being led to be slaughtered.

It was from Genia that I learned the fate of Asya and her family, and of the friends that I had left behind. It was a tragic account. When the war broke out between Germany and Russia in 1941, about 1000 Jews, mostly men, left with the retreating Soviet army to escape the Germans. My sister's husband, Stanley, was among them. He hoped to return soon, but the roads were already blocked by the Germans and he never made it back. My sister faced a very hard life. At that time, Genia and her family were struggling for survival in a crowded living situation, but they nonetheless, made room for Asya and her children. Food was scarce and the supply kept dwindling. Genia described Asya as being devastated without any contact with us, and unable to cope with hungry children and no food. Asya cried continuosly, lacking the means to provide the basic needs of her family and of herself. Asya also felt guilty about taking some of her relatives meagre supply of soup. Sometimes she ran to friends' homes, leaving her little ones behind so she could beg for a spare garment or a piece of bread. In a desperate state, my sister had become a burden to the family.

She agreed to leave Ostrog and go to our uncle, Meir, who lived in Mizocz, a small town about 20 km. from Ostrog.

Unfortunately, the stay was a brief one. Soon after she arrived, there was a pogrom. Asya and her two children tried to escape the German massacre by running towards the woods. A witness reported that Asya was slowed down by carrying her baby son in her arms and holding the hand of her 4 year daughter. The persuing assassin did not even see their faces. They were shot from behind, denied the right to live because they were born Jewish.

Even now the impact of this information is devastating. It is difficult for me to comprehend that all this occurred in the 20th century! At times, I try to convince myself that things like this did not happen, that I merely read about it in a history book of the Middle Ages. But I must face reality. I whisper to myself, that life goes on and I only hope that this kind of organized brutality will never be repeated.

Genia's family did not fare much better by staying in Ostrog. When the Germans entered the town they immediately started a campaign of murder and plunder. The Jews were an easy mark, since most ofthem lived in the same area. The Christians of Ostrog were easily able to identify the Jewish homes. Most of the non-Jews gladly cooperated with the Germans and facilitated their terrible task.

Asya could not have survived the war in Ostrog either, because shortly after they occupied the town, the Germans created a ghetto, where life became brutal for its occupants. Made to wear the yellow band with the star of David, Jews were deprived of all rights. They were not allowed to walk on Aryan sidewalks lest they might contaminate non-Jews,b y shaking hands with them at the marketplace. They had to wait in long lines to receive a piece of bread and a bowl of soup. This was their daily ration. No other food was delivered to the ghetto. Hungry, exhausted physically and emotionally many Jews began to act strangely. Some literally went mad. The ghetto was never meant to be permanent residence but a place of dehumanization. After breaking the spirits and bodies of their victims, they would be ready for mass murders, or with shipment to concentration and extermination camps.

The Nazis occupied Ostrog in July, and by August 4th they committed

their first act of mass butchery. Three thousand Jews were dragged out of their homes, taken to the woods, and murdered. This massacre was followed by yet another one in September when 2,000 more were murdered. A third and final mass murder took place in October 1942 when another 3,000 were killed on the outskirts of Ostrog. About 800 Jews escaped to the forest, but of these only a few survived. They were often betrayed by the local peasants. Some of those who escaped,either organized or joined partisan groups of resiistance fighters.

Each of the three massacres lasted less than a day. To shoot thousands of people within several hours required much effort and speed. Known for their efficiency, the Nazis, with the collaboration of the local population, managed to succeed. Early in the morning Jews were ordered out of their homes for "deportation" to work camps. To make their ploy more plausible, the Jews were given permission to take some of their possessions. As they were driven into a central area, the Germans arranged them in two lines sending some of them to the right and others to the left. People in one line were told to go home. The others, under heavy armed guard, were told to undress, arranging their belongings in piles for shoes, outer clothing and underclothing. Without screaming or weeping these exhausted people undressed, said their farewells and prayers, and waited for the fatal moment. In an instant the shooting began and the entire line of helpless victims one by one, was at the edge of a prepared ditch.

Those not selected for death often did not realize that most of them would be killed in two subsequent "actions". My close friend, Eve, was killed in Ostrog's third "action". An attractive brunette with a striking face, Eve was a very independent teenager. She came from an educated family who encouraged her to express her views openly. This was unusual where most parentswanted their children to be obedient. During the final "action", when the Nazis were chasing out Jews from their homes and rounding them up for deportation, Eve did not want to be pushed around. While being beaten severely, she stood up to them and courageously announced in a loud voice, that the enemy's end was near and that the Jews would triumph.

The furious Germans killed her on the spot, in front of all her young friends who had been loaded into the freight car which would take them out to the forest to be shot. About 30 people survived the horror of those mass killings. Thrown into the mass grave, these survivors pretended to

be dead after they were shot. The Germans were in too much of a hurry to check on all their victims. In the still of the night, those wretched, naked creatures crawled outfrom beneath the corpses and searched for a place to hide. Their only hope was finding someone humane enough to give them clothes and overnight shelter.

These survivors were not the only witnesses of the massacre. One witness was Herman Frederich Graebe, a German civil engineer in charge of a German construction firm. In published testimony, he describes one location where Jews from Dubno had been shot in three large pits. About I500 people had been shot daily. All of the 5,000 Jews who had remained in town before the pogrom, were to be exterminated. He vividly remembered an old, paralyzed woman being undressed by other naked people while two other victims were holding her up. They then carried her to the pit to be shot with the rest of them. [2]

[2] Graebe, Frederick, **Graebe Memorandum**, Charlock & Spencer, pp. 87-88

Recording this in the GRAEBE MEMORANDUM, Mr. Graebeactuveky resisted this massive manslaughter. I learned about him before reading his testimony as he saved my best friend, Rose, and hundreds of other innocent Jews who were about to be shot.

During one "action" Graebe tricked the Nazis, insisting that he needed one hundred Jew workers for his factory. When the Nazis refused to cooperate with him, Graebe lied that this was an order from Hitler himself. He picked al00 Jews, ordering them to follow him. After getting them out of sight, he hid the Jews in different locations.

After the last action in Ostrog, the Nazis were still searching for individual Jewish fugitives. Those that they found hidden in attics or basements were shot on the spot. The sound of gunfire was heard throughout the silent and deserted town. The last sounds or moaning and sobbing were extinguished in those flashes of light and smoke.

The entire atmosphere of the town was plunged into permanent dusk. With all Jewish homes destroyed, former friends and neighbors shamelessly came to shareanyusuable clothing, furniture and other possessions left behind by Jews. Jewish owned stores were robbed by the locals of any remaining inventory. The marketplace's I00 or so small shops, mostly operated by Jews, Was now in ruins. The once busy and noisy town was

sullen and silent. This was the final chapter in the long history of Ostrog Jewry.

After losing all their loved ones, the remaining few survivors left the town forever. After the war, Poland pretended that anti-Semitism did not exist. These Jews did not want to risk another pogrom so many made their way to Palestine, where they could live among their own people. They fears were well founded, because only a few months later, another pogrom took place in Kielce on July 4, 1946. A mob murdered 4l Jews. This was the beginning of other pogroms that exploded all over the country. [3]
[3] Meltzer, Milton, **Never to Forget**, p.21

Dorothy and Marc, friends who immigrated to the United States, were among the the few from my hometown who survived the war. Survival was difficult for these two teenagers who lost their entire families in the three mass killings in Ostrog. The two of them first hid out in a small, crowded room in the ghetto and later escaped into the woods where they joined the Polish partisans. During the day they hid in an underground bunker and at night they foraged for food for themselves and others who were hiding with them. Crying babies were a big problem,, because their crying attracted German patrols that were seeking Jews and partisans. One day the Nazis discovered their bunker and Dorothy was shot in the foot while trying to escape. The Germans did not catch her as she was carried away to the hospital by her friends. She was accepted as a Polish girl and was treated for her infected foot.

Marc had fled back to the woods and later ,because of his Christian documents, he was recommended to a German general as a Russian-German translator. His German uniform made it possible for him to visit Dorothy in the hospital. One night,in the delirium of high fever, Dorothysaid a few words in Yiddish. Fortunately, a Polish girl hushed her up and thereafter became her protector.To keep up Dorothy's cover, Marc always greeted her iwth a "Heil Hitler" when he came by to visit. In l944 when the Russians invaded Ostrog, the two high school sweethearts were liberated and made good on their plans to immigrate.

I did not know anyone who was able to fight the Nazis with weapons., but I often think about my friend Eve's brave resistance. She was the girl who loudly predicted the Nazis' demise before being shot. Her bewildered fellow victims wer never taught to fight back. They were trained to

overlook injustice and discrimination as a survival tactic for a weak minority. This phlosophy was why at first, Jews believed that Nazism was just another form of European anti-Semitism that was going to bring repression, perhaps a few minor atrocities, and then disappear for awhile. By the time they finally understood Hitler's intentions, the "final solution" of the Jewish problem, it was too late to organize and fight. The result was cataclysmic: By 1943, millions of Jews had been murdered in gas chambers. [4]

[4] Einstein, **Guide to Judaism**, p.75

There were Jewish resistance groups in hundreds of ghettos throughout eastern Europe, but few in the many small towns were aware of them. In some cases, the Jewish underground organizations helped set up restistance activity, but in many towns the rebellions were spontaneous. In 1943 after visiting Warsaw, Himmler ordered the mass deportation of Jews to the death camps. Soon afterwards, Jewish fighters started guerilla attacks against the Nazis. Nineteen hundred Jews were killed and sixty five hundred were taken to the death camps, but the Germans too, suffered heavy losses. These Jews knew that they were doomed, but were determined to fight back. They fought from the sewers and rooftops with grenades, bricks and rifles, determined to prove that the enemy was not invincible.

The armed revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto lasted for weeks; the Jewish leaders were killed, but there was no surrender. When the Germans completely destroyed the ghetto, a few survivors managed to escape joining the Polish partisans to continue their fight against the Nazis. The world forgets that Jews initiated the first major civilianr evolt against the Nazis in all of occupied Europe. (5)

[5] Meltzer, Milton, p.178

CHAPTER NINE

SURVIVORS FORGIVING AND FORGETTING

My sister Asya's husband was one of the Jews who did fight the Nazis in different circumstance. Stanley lived through the war, fighting with the Soviet armys' Polish unit, under the command of General Anders. Although

I was relieved to hear that Stanley was alive, I was bitter that he leftfor the Soviet Union without my sister. It was hard for me to accept her death so I found it difficult to greet him warmly when he visited me in Paris.He learned from a friend that I had left Poland for France and he was eager to see me.

The death of my sister was a hearbreaking loss for me. I could not understand why Stanley did not take his family along to the Soviet Union. I learned that Asya was running after the coach, pleading with him not to leave her with the two children. But Stanley was told that only men were in immediate danger, and that very soon he would be coming back. Obviously, it was bad judgment on his part as he never saw Asya and the children again. I realized that other men acted on the same belief, but no explanation from Stanley was satisfactory to me. Later, however, I came to the conclusion that no one should be held responsible for decisions made during the occupation. Nobody could foresee the enormity of the atrocities committed by the Nazis and it was not until two years later that many became aware. It was only in June 1941, when Hitler broke the non-aggression pact with Stalin, that massacres took place throughout eastern Europe. That same year the death camps started to operate with Jews being transported to them en masse.

After numerous conversations with Stanley, I forgave him for surviving without Asya. I realized that he had suffered enough during the war and that life would not be easy for him either. We became friends and close family again until his death in 1991. I still miss my sister who made me her close friend and confidant. Being very popular with boys, Asya enjoyed having dates. The rule of the house "no going out during weekdays" was restrictive and she sometimes broke the rule. I was the one to cover up for her when she left without permission. In return I was allowed to share her room at night.

When she was 16 years old, my family arranged dates for her with prospective husbands.When they came to meet her, I wasoften there at her side. If Asya let me know that she did not like a particular match, I made sure it would fail. Very quickly I found all the bad traits of her date's character and made them known to my parents. I helped her sabotoge matchesseveral times. An independent girl, Asya resented attempts at matchmaking. She wanted to make her own choice.

Asya's difficulties continued until Abrasha brought his best friend, Stanley, from Warsaw to the country for the summer. Stanley and my sister were immediately attracted to each other and at the end of the summer he proposed to her. We were all excited for them. My future brother-in-law was bright, educated, sociable, generous and most importantly, he was Asya's own choice. Since they were so young, we wished them a long and happy life together. They were married for just a few years when the war shattered their lives.

I think of Asya very often and last night had one of those vivid dreams. Asya asked me to cover up for her again. It must have been a weekday about 7p.m.and a boyfriend would wait for her. She was going to sneak out for a while to meet him, and, I was to run out and warn her if she were in danger of being discovered. Alas, it was just a dream, a pleasant memory, or perhaps a desperate attempt to revive a time whenI could protect Asya from harm.

In I945, when the Soviets invaded Warsaw and liberated some concentration camps, the Nazis were still in a hurry to commit their last massacres. They were retreating quickly and had no choice but leave behind Jews still alive in some camps. Whereever they could, they blew up the crematoria, and destroyed camp records. To prevent the liberation of many survivors, the S.S. pushed them towards Germany during the cold winter, where they could be exterminated even faster. Time was running out, and the Allied forces were advancing. Sick, without food and worn down, Jews died by the thousands just days and weeks before they would have been free. [6]

Despite my own difficult situation, I was glad to do my part in helping other newly liberated refugees. When news from the front reached Lvov, I became very agitated. Although I was now under Russian occupation, I could not remain still, not knowing anything about my family. I left school and decided to go to Warsaw to look for some clues. I knew that American-Jewish organizations there had learned about the atrocities committed by the Germans, and had rushed with financial and moral support. In Warsaw I immediately enrolled in medical school, but at the same time worked hard to help refugees from the Soviet Union, who were without any means of subsistence. War orphans were in particular need of help. We had to quickly provide places for them to live in war damaged Warsaw.

The city was liberated by the Russsians, but the war with Germany was not yet over. No one was thinking of repairing the demolished buildings yet. I helped run a children's refugee center where I distributed clothing and parcels of food sent from the United States. I knew that these youngsters would require a lot of time, energy and effort so I moved t be closer to them. Our charitable organization finally found a two room apartment with kitchen facilities for 17 teenagers, boys and girls, between 12 and 15 years old. These poor children had started the long journey home when the Germans began to retreat. We took them in, hoping to give them a temporary home. I will never forget the shelter that I ran.

Here were eventeen sweet faces crowded together, trying to adjust to the conditions of a new world after years of war and wandering.They never learned to give to share or to love. Until now, their main goal was naked survival, stealing food to live another day. Some of them found shelter in various places for short periods of time, but they alsways left, hoping to find their family. They were in a very bad state of mind. In the beginning, they were unmanageable, and looked at us with suspicion. During the first few weeks, I stayed with them overnight, afraid of their fighting among themselves. Not knowing what to expect from those angry youngsters, I did not want to take any chances.

The primary task for me and two other adult supervisors was to make sure they would gain weight and regaint heir health after years of malnutrition. Next, we had to cope with their traumatic experiences as best as possible, including the fact that most of them did not know what happened to their parents. Some of these teenagers, had either been sent away from their homes to avoid roundups or had run away before being deported to the camps. Others were temporarily hidden during the war by Christians or had made it to the Soviet Zone without their families.They desperately missed their parents.

During their long ordeal, they were hungry and cold and had no affection from anybody. When no food was available, they learned to steal from homes,stores or farms. To survive, they had become hardened criminals. Now we had to instill their original values and make them understand that the war was over. Food and clothing had to be paid for now, and further lawbreaking was no longer acceptable. The task before us was immense, because they neither trusted us nor liked anyone - including themselves.

Instead of asking for more food, it was easier to steal from a roommate.

. My assistants, Feliks and Nachum, tried in vain to talk to the more mature boys. They were not ready to accept any rules. When they stole from each other, we preferred counselling to punishment. With much patience we eventually restored their faith in people, their love for others, and most importantly, their self esteem. My colleagues and I spent long hours talking to them and listening to their sad stories. They were initially very angry and secretive, refusing to reveal much about their past. Many felt abandoned by their parents whom they accused of being selfish and unfair.

They soon learned that I and others were also children who were left alone, and we had to fight to conquer our feelings of anger and bitterness. We tried to show them that we too had suffered and endured much pain, mourning our loved ones. We talked while cooking, cleaning, washing dishes, and during our daily walks. Letting go of their own misfortunes, they started to hear us, listen to our war experiences. The teenagers began to understand that there were other survivors who had similar tragedies to tell.

Eventually, their faces brightened up with an occasional smiles, and they were able to hug each other. The boys began expressing their feelings openly and the girls began to put colorful ribbons in their hair .We knew that our efforts were not in vain, and we gained confidence in ourselves by instilling it in them. The children slowly started to seek our advice, realyzing that they had found friends who genuinely cared for them.

I can still see statuesque, Tania, with her lovely face and beautiful blond hair whose speech and behavior indicated a cultured background. After getting shot by the Germans, her right leg had been amputated up to the knee. While she was recuperating from her wounds, I would put her to bed every night, with the help of her peers. Her lovely face showed pain but she did not complain. Her gestures manifested a hidden elegance, that was distinctive. She was quiet, but not shy and got her peers' attention whenever she spoke. The other youngsters soon wanted to take care of her themselves, showing much love and concern for her well being. Tania's face reflected even more beauty, as almost every boy wanted to court her. She made much progress and soon emigrated to Israel, got married and had two children.

What a wonderful feeling it was to see them one by one healing, blossoming, caring for each other, falling in love. Even if they yelled and argued normally, we could take pride in the extent of their recovery. As the months passed, more children received permission from the Polish government to emigrate to Israel. The whole group soon left, determined to begin a new life. They left us in far better spirits and health, but, in spite of our love and efforts, we knew that these teenagers were scarred for life.

Feliks and I still worried about them, assuring ourselves that those teenagers were prepared to challenge life. Their past was full of hardship, but Feliks insisted that other children were not as lucky. He told me a story of a family that he knew in the Warsaw ghetto. They came from Lodz when the Warsaw Ghetto was in existence for over a year. It was a nightmare to witness daily life in the streets at that time. Among the faces of misery, hopelessness and hunger was this family of eight. The father was pushing three children in one carriage while the mother pushed three others in a second carriage. The parents would walk along the edge of the street singing old, Yiddish songs accompanied by six weak children's voices that repeated the words after them. As the days passed there remained only four weak voices in the chorus, then three. Soon afterwards one of the carriages disappeared, along with their shoes and coats. When Felix last saw this family only the husband and wife remained. The mother, at the age of 39 looked like a skeleton and the enfeebled couple went on singing the same old Yiddish song, their bony hands outstreched to receive a few coins from passers-by.

Feliks got very emotional when he talked about the ghetto and I encouraged him to go on talking to help him get out some deeply rooted feelings. According to him there was another family that the Germans resettled in the Warsaw Ghetto. Before the war Nachum, a married man with five children, led a comfortable life as an owner of a successful business. Within a few months in the ghetto, however, he became a beggar. His wife and one of his daughters died of typhus in the same week.The family moved from their one room apartment to public shelter, and, soon to the streets. Nachum walked the streets with three of his children, clinging to his shredded clothes and carrying a fourth child on his shoulder. They shuffled along singing only the one Jewish song, "Thank you God that I'm a Jew."

The children all died from hunger and Nachum's legs became very swollen. He nonetheless kept walking and held his head high. Autumn was soon followed by winter. Deprived of shoes and clothing, he wrapped himself in a feather quilt reinforced by pieces of string. From the bottom of the quilt one could see his two swollen legs; from the top one saw the dried out yellow skin of his long, thin face. As the feathers began to fly out of the quilt, people made room for him to pass on the eternally crowded streets of the ghetto. Here and there someone would throw a few pennies into a can he had hanging from a string.

Nachum continued on his rounds with a smile. Was he an idiot or a wise man? It was impossible for Feliks to forget the permanent smile on the face of a man who must have lost his mind. After all, he had already lost his wife, his five children, his home and his dignity.

Janet Rogowsky
4 Wagon Wheel Rd.
Mamaroneck, NY 10543
(914) 698-0826 or 698-2458

PART III

CHAPTER ONE

REUNITED WITH ANYA

It was in Warsaw that the American organization, The Joint Distribution Committee, put me in touch with my relatives in New York. When my uncles learned that I had survived, they made a tremendous effort to find more family members. They ha no success. Their goal now was to bring me to the United States and give me a home.

But being in America was not in my thoughts; my only destination was Palestine, a Jewish enclave where anti-Semitism would not be a threat The Holocaust's slaughter of millions of innocent Jews, taught me that only a Jewish state would provide a chance for a happy life. Events took another turn, however. After many negotiations with my three uncles, I agreed to come to the United States for a visit. This would give me a chance to meet my father's brothers who had left Poland in the 1920s.

Their official request for my visit enabled me to obtain a Polish passport to travel to New York via Paris. Feliks, now my boyfriend, left Warsaw with me, and was going to remain in France to wait for my return. Before going on to New York from Paris, I went to Germany to look for my sister Anya.

Prior to my departure I asked the Red Cross to broadcast a radio message to their German office that I had survived and was looking for my sister. The war was not yet over for her. It was 1945;the Germans were still fighting the Allied forces and I did not know whether she had received my message. She did hear it through a friend, who worked for the radio, but Anya had no way to reply.

Feliks and I began the trip to liberated Germany without any clue as to

her whereabouts. Thanks to an old acquaintance whom I met in Frankfort, I learned that Anya was in a Polish camp. She had not revealed her real identity and continued to work as a Pole, living under terrible conditions. One of the camps was not far from Frankfort so we took a chance and looked for her there.

With the poor travel conditions and the emotional strain of searching for my only surviving family member, the trip was an arduous one. When we finally arrived at the railroad station, I noticed an old woman looking at the arriving passengers. As soon as we passed her I heard someone calling out my name. I turned around and realized that the old woman was Anya.

Had she not attracted my attention by calling my name, I would not have recognized her. Anya was bent over and appeared to be drained of all vitality. As I looked at her I could only see a faint glimmer of those beautiful black eyes, that once sparkled with warmth. When I last saw her, she was still a teenaged girl full of life and courage. The Anya I knew had not survived the war.

After the first shock of our dramatic reunion, she held on to me as if afraid that I might leave. Anya kept asking questions without waiting for an answer. She was desperate to get some information about the family, refusing to accept the tragic truth. She was eager to hear that someone was alive, waiting for her to come home and create a new life. She kept shaking her head in disbelief, rejecting the notion that everyone else were dead. Anya's continuous sobbing prevented her from walking straight and she was constantly pulling me closer. During this unforgettable walk from the train station, my sister never mentioned that she had become a mother a few months earlier. She was concerned about my reaction.

Exhausted from walking, we found a coachman to take us to Anya's camp. She was hugging and kissing me all the way. It was there that I met the charming baby boy whom I had not been told about. Anya, frail and lacking the basic necessities for life, was taking care of a five month's old child. How was she to manage without adequate food, clothing, privacy, and essentials like soap? How could I possibily leave her in such circumstances? What would become of them without my help?

These concerns persisted, as Anya needed years of recuperation before she could regain her characteristic enthusiasm and energy. It was only a

miracule that Anya came to the station to meet me. She dreamt the night before that I was coming to see her. In spite of all the efforts of her husband and a friend to discourage her from the long 15km. walk to the station from her camp, she insisted that I would arrive in the morning. I did.

After this miraculous reunion, we knew then that we would never permanently separate. Together would continue looking for our family and rebuilding our lives. For the next few days Feliks and I stayed in their single room, shared with another Polish woman. The tiny room was dark, and the linen washed without soap. There was hardly any food available. I wanted to transfer her to a Jewish displaced persons camp, where, thanks to the financial support from the American Jewish community, Anya's family would have been better fed and cared for.

But my efforts were in vain. Anya was still afraid to face the outside world; she did not want to move. I felt sad to leave her behind in such squalid conditions, but we had to leave for Paris. because our passport indicated the date of our departure from Germany. Soon after our arrival to France, we made arrangements to bring my sister and her family to Paris. This was no easy task as a displaced person could not receive a passport. There was a quota of immigrants alloweto enter the United States and this would mean a long wait.

The most important thing was to get her out of Germany. Anya courageously withstood these many months of hardship by teaching religion to children in a Catholic elementary school, under her assumed name of course. For compensation she got an extra loaf of bread daily. She had confidence that Feliks and I would help finding lodging for the three of them in Paris, where housing was scarce,

Feliks liked my sister and I knew that we could count on his help.Before we left Germany, Feliks and I separated for two days. While in Warsawhe learned that his mother and one of his two sisters survived the concentration camps and were in Austria. He was eager to see them alone. He did not mention that his previous girlfriend, Irene, also survived and lived near his family.After our arrival in France, I chanced upon a letter from Irene, but I did not reveal my discovery to Feliks. I kept that secret to myself, letting him decide his own future.

After the visiting his family, my boyfriend was in good spirits. His mother and sister were doing fairly well and were determined to join him as soon as possible. I was not told about his meeting with Irene. Feliks was happy to join me and to move on to Paris. He

Our brief separation did not change our relationship. He was always terse about his past and refused to answer questions. When he found out about his mother's and sister's survival, he shared the news with me in a few short sentences. I did not know any details and he was not ready to provide too much information.

Feliks was very close to his family before the war and showed a lot of devotion and feelings for his mother and sister when I first met them. Nonetheless he built a wall between himself and the past which was always difficult to penetrate.

Mietek, who is married to my cousin, Genia, was the one who gave me a detailed account ofFeliks' meeting with his sister, Basia. When I lived in Warsaw after the war, Mietek became a good friend of mine. I used to see him quite often and we enjoyed each other's company. He looked very handsome in his officer's uniform, and he was well read, intelligent and dignified. He was in charge of the military airportin Warsaw, so he had a spacious apartment to entertain his friends. M. was the personal pilot of the President of Poland, Mr. Bierut, and the other pilots all respected him. His position and rank of captain enabled him to obtain more food than the rest of us.

Mietek met Feliks at my workplace and they became friends. At that time Mietik was on furlough from the Russian air force so he could visit his ailing father, Mr. Laks, a concentration camp survivor. When walking along the street, a young pregnant woman approached him, recognizing him from a photo she had seen. She had good news for him:His younger sister, Reginaalso had survived a concentration camp and was living in Austria.

This woman planning to visit Mr. Laks in the hospital, but was very eager to find her own missing brother. Mietek promised to help her. He asked Feliks to share his list of Warsaw survivors with the young woman who was now visiting his father. When the two men arrived at the hospital and opened the door to Mr. Laks' room, Feliks realized to his astonishment that the pregnant woman sitting there was his sister, Basia.

When Basia told her brother that their mother had also survived, he was overwhelmed with emotion. Basia, relieved too see her brother alive, was eager to return to Austria to be with mother. She left the following day with Feliks promising to visit them in the near future.

He never told me about this meeting. Perhaps he wanted to spare me pain but I never did learn what was going on in his mind. Maybe he was more complicated than I knew, more tortured than I suspected. And yet, he continued to enjoy life to its fullest until his premature death in 1955. His battle experience in the Polish army and the Warsaw ghetto along with his incarceration in two concentration camps finally took their toll. He died of a massive heart attack. He was alone when it happened.

During this period, Feliks hardly left my office, in Warsaw. He made sure that I took a break from work, but I was too deeply involved with the orphans in my charge to notice how important we had become to each other. He always waited to walk me home, because the city was in ruins and the dark, deserted streets were dangerous. The situation in the city was deplorable. Warsaw had most of her housing destroyed and food was in short supply.

I found a small room in Prague, the old part of Warsaw. A coal stove, in the center of the room, provided me with heat, whenever coal was available. During the nights when I was not needed in the children's center, I slept in my own room. I soon lost the company of my cousin Genia but for good reasons. Genia's surviving brother, Ludwig sent a messenger to bring her to live with him in Cracow.

At the time Ludwig was sharing a room with Wisia, a Polish girl who risked her life to help him survive. When I went to visit Genia and Ludwiga few weeks later, I met Wisia. She was pregnant and very much in love with my cousin. I was impressed by her devotion and warmth. In spite of crowded quarters, Wisia welcomed not only Ludwig's family, but any Jew who needed shelter, while looking for surviving relatives in Cracow. The floor of their room was big enough to accommodate four or five people.

Wisia and Ludwig stayed in Poland until 1945 before leaving for Germany where they now live with their married son. I was delighted to see Genia

again, who was better dressed and better fed than during her earlier stay with me. Genia was also more relaxed because she had met a nice man, a lawyer, who was very much in love with her and wanted to marry her. However, Ludwig let me know that she was not excited with this proposal. When I returned to Warsaw I was determined to play the role of matchmaker by introducing Genia to Mietek who agreed to meet her in my place. They were immediately attracted to one another and they were married within a month. After a brief intimate party, the newlyweds of them left for Cracow.

CHAPTER TWO

SOMEONE TO SHARE WITH

As for my own romantic life, I had met Feliks one hot summer day only a few weeks prior to Genia's wedding. One day, this nice -looking young man appeared in my office and volunteered his services in our orphanage Feliks was amiable, bright and well spoken. I hired him to be my assistant, because he was willing to work the long hours which the job required. He was only a couple months out of a concentration camp. He had managed to gain some weight but he was still very thin. He weighed only 88 pounds when the Allied forces liberated him.

Feliks was ready to start working immediately and agreed to travel with me to different cities in Poland. He realized that the very poor roads and lack of public transportation would cause us much hardship. Part of my job entailed soliciting funds for the Polish survivors who lived in deplorable conditions, and raising money at the time was a very difficult task. I had to find those Jews who were receiving help from other countries and who were willing to share what they had with needy with needy strangers.

His presence and moral support made it easier for me to face the challenge. With each trip, we widened our contacts and it became less difficult to make our requests. These long trips brought us closer and we became good friends with a common goal: to give our time and efforts to those less fortunate.

Before the war, Feliks lived in Paris. As a painter he had already exhibited some of his work. Now he planned to do a series of paintings on the Holocaust, based on his experiences in the Warsaw ghetto, and in concentration camps.

He began working on this project in Warsaw completing four huge murals, which depicted the atrocities committed by the Germans. Unfortunately, the murals were stolen before we left Germany for France. I never saw a man sobbing so bitterly. After losing his work, he was overwhelmed with the grief and pain that he had placed into his work.

It was a long time before he continued to work on this series depicting life in the Warsaw ghetto and the concentration camps. He worked for months on them. One of the most striking ones showed women whose breasts were pinned to their stomach with safety pins. They were surrounded by Nazis who ordered them to do kneebends. Although he started to reproduce some of the lost works, he felt that he was not able to recapture the same mood.

Feliks agreed to assist me at the children's center. The majority of youngsters were boys who hardly remembered their father and badly needed a man they could confide in. It was difficult for 13 and 15 year old youngsters to discuss intimate feelings with a woman. Feliks was also very helpful with the distribution of goods among the needy. When an American delegation from JOINT visited Warsaw to examine the condition of the survivors, he was part of the welcoming committee.

From a word dropped here and there, I pieced together his miraculous escape from the Warsaw ghetto and how a Polish friends Peter and his wife sheltered him, his sister, her husband, mother, and girlfriend in their home. Peter hid them in a hollowed bunker in the wall, behind the bathroom medicine chest. This space was too small for the five of them. Only one person could sit down, while the four others were standing, waiting for their turn. No one could leave this shelter without Peter's approval. Everything had to be brought to them and since they could not safely use the bathroom facilities, Peter had to carry out pans.

Sometimes, when the night was quiet and dark, one of them would crawl out of the hiding space to stretch out for a few moments. When the Nazis

started to systematically destroy the ghetto, Peter's building caught on fire and everybody was told to get out. The family was sent to different concentration camps but they pledged to meet in Warsaw if they survived. Each survivor was going to write his or her name on a large rock, which they had designated. When Feliks was finally freed and and able to return to Warsaw, he found his mother's and sister's names already on the rock. Irene's name was missing. Although my boyfriend was reluctant to speak about his past, he did tell me about one experience. His work assignment in camp was to paint the soldiers' barracks, which were a distance from the prisoners' compound. One day, at 4 p.m. , he did not hear the bell calling for the workers' return. As he continued on his job, he heard shouting and the barking of a attack dogs. The Nazis pulled him down the ladder, wrapped him around in wet sheets to not leave any marks, beat him severely, then loosed the dogs on him and when he was unconscious, they tied him to a motorcycle and dragged him to the prisoners' quarters.

In spite of this savage abuse, he felt lucky to be alive. He was determined to survive and, through his painting, to depict the barbaric acts committed against Jews in the camp. No one would believe these horror stories and he was going to bare witness to the world. Now with the war over, he was ready to turn his nightmare into art. He believed that Paris would provide the artistic stimulus and give him peace of mind. He knew and loved the city where he had lived for a few years until1939. When the war broke out, he was stranded in Poland, while visiting his family.

When we arrived in Paris we stayed in a residential hotel, conveniently located near Gare de l'Est. We were constantly concerned about our relatives and yet we tried to enjoy Paris and make up for our lost time, during the war. We quickly made new friends. Most of Feliks' former friends either were killed or had left the country. Determined to succeed , he worked hard and managed to have a few exhibitions of his paintings. My job was to walk around the gallery and listen to art critics, reporting back to him.

The critical reaction was encouring. In addition, he was doing commercial art to support himself. With financial help from my uncles. I, too, managed to get along. We had been denied years of culture. Now we saw three or four cultural events a day. Meanwhile, my American family kept inviting me to visit them. Now, in Paris Feliks was apprehensive about my trip, but he understood that meeting my relatives was essential. When he finally

consented, I applied for a three month tourist visa to the States.

Before leaving, I managed to bring Anya and her family to Paris. My uncles agreed to help her financially until her husband, Adam, found a job. When they were about to arrive, I became panicky, because I had no place in Paris where they could live. Miraculously, I found a former friend of my brother, Abrasha, who helped me find temporary living quarters for them. A relative who was expecting survivors from Poland, was keeping this apartment for them. He graciously allowed my family to stay there temporarily for a nominal fee.This one room suburban flat was very modest. It had no running water, and came with an outhouse. The neighbors only spoke French which Anya and her family did not understand. It was a hard life for them, but they had a roof over their heads and hope for a better future. They also knew that I would not abandon them. My trip to New York was going to be a brief one and Feliks promised to help them get settled in my absence.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE NEW WORLD

In the spring of 1947 I arrived at LaGuardia Airport in New York not knowing what to expect. The flight lasted 19 hours and throughout my journey I wondered who would be there to greet me. I kept chasing away ugly thoughts about being alone at the airport. Suppose my relatives did not receive my telegram? How was I going to explain my problems to a customs officer in Polish? How would I reach My relatives in Brooklyn andLong Island, without knowing how to say more than ; "How do you do?" with a Slavic accent?

As I was approaching the immigration desk, I heard someone calling my name. A customs officer took me by the hand to meet my Uncle Joe, a handsome man, in his early forties with a quick smile and a warm personality. Visibly emotional, he greeted me with the few Polish words he still remembered from his childhood. . Holding hands as we walked out, I heard voices from different directions in the arrival area, calling out my name in Polish, Yiddish and English. I was overwhelmed with the reception.

All my American family was there.

My uncles immediately made me feel at home. Each of them reminded me of my father. They greeted me warmly, embracing and kissing me. With difficulty we communicated a little bit in the Polish and Russian that they still remembered. Their spouses and children could not understand what we were saying. We drove to Long Island and talked until the early morning, in my Uncle Eli's house. They were eager to hear about my survival, about Anya and about those who did not survive. They were numb with grief upon hearing that the entire family children and adults had perished within months. My uncles were still looking for relatives through various organizations, but it was all in vain. In spite of their own frustrations, they tried to cheer me up, to make me feel wanted.

My newfound family assured me that the United States was different from Europe and that this kind of tragedy could not have happened here. Uncle Joe, the eldest, remembered his trip to Poland before World War II. He tried to convince his loved ones to leave Poland and come to America, because he had heard about the growing anti-Semitism in Germany. He worried about the family and about the safety of all European Jews . Unfortunately, his efforts failed. He and his wife left for the United States without ever understanding why his family would not take his advice insisting upon remaining in Poland.

As respected citizens of their community, who personally had not experienced anti-Semitism, my father and his family could not believe that their lives would ever be in jeopardy. They led a comfortable existence and were not ready to leave it all behind. The fact that Abrasha, had to sit in the Jewish designated seats, while the university, was not considered a death threat. Jews had grown accustomed to that kind of discrimination in Warsaw, which had the largest population of Jews living in Europe. They accepted this situation and gladly sat with their own people.

Polish Jewry was not brought up to fight for equality. For the sake of peace, they preferred to avoid any conflict. Alexander Stille eloquently writes about this in his book: *Benevolence and Betrayal* : " Faced with arbitrary power in its many forms, the Jews learned to keep their heads down and let the storm pass. When faced with crisis, rather than protest, they redoubled their efforts to remain exemplary, law-abiding citizens

stressing their long-standing service to the ruler." [**Stille**, p.60]

After a few days of long conversations, we decided to stop talking about the past. Eager to learn English, I registered in a language course in Queens College and worked hard to master it as quickly as possible. My little cousins enjoyed making fun of my pronunciation, but I insisted that they speak to me. Although tiring out my aunts with constant questions about the language, all my relatives were patient. And I succeeded. After three months of studying I could read the *New York Times* , write letters and compostions, read books and carry on a conversation at length.

I commuted alone to Manhattan and to the other boroughs. When I lost my purse on a bus, I refused to return home until I found it. My late arrival caused an uproar. Not knowing my whereabouts, they all worried about me. After they calmed down, I knew that they were proud of me and my determination to be independent. The whole family treated me generously and with love. Each uncle wanted me to stay in his house and I spent some time in each of their homes. From time to time, they suggested that I reconsider my plans and remain in the United States. But I was not willing to talk about this possibility.

I wanted to return to Paris, where my boyfriend was waiting. Finally, my uncles volunteered to telephone and write to Feliks inviting him to come for a visit. After lengthy conversations and long letters, he agreed to join me after obtaining a visa for three months. I never believed that he would come. Paris was the city he loved and which provided many opportunities in art. He had never thought of America and was simply looking forward to my return. But Feliks did not want to disappoint me, seeing from my letters how I felt about the United States.

I constantly wrote about this special country, about the many different religious, national, and ethnic groups living together. There were tremendous opportunities, I assured him, for people with talent. Trusting my judgment, he was willing to join me. My uncles were eager to meet Feliks. They heard me talk about my boyfriend and realized that I was in love. When he arrived they were kind and hospitable to him and approving my choice of boyfriends.

Feliks enjoyed their company. Shortly after his arrival he tooka trip to

New York City. When he returned home in the evening, he surprised me with an engagement ring and two wedding bands. My family was very pleased. We were married in my uncle's house and stayed with the family for a couple of weeks until we found a modest apartment.

My relatives tried to convince us to remain in New York. They examined the immigration law, which did not allow a visitor to become a permanent resident. One had to leave the country and reapply for entry to the United States.Otherwise one risked being deported. We could not take any chances so we left for Canada. There both of us found jobs, applied for entry into the United States and waited for our passports.

One day while reading the newspaper we found an ad for a spacious house being offered by a widow who was going abroad for one year. She wanted a young couple to live in the house during her absence and was not going to charge rent. During the interview with her, we insisted on paying a modest rent and concluded our arrangement with her. This big house enabled us to bring my mother-in-law who stayed with us until her daughter's arrival from Austria. Feliks lost his father and a sister in the war and now his mother and his surviving sister wanted to stay close. Meanwhile, I obtained all the necessary documents for Anya and within a few months they sailed for Canada from France.

The hardship that she and her family endured in France was shown on their faces, but little Sidney kept smiling. They moved into a two room apartment in Montreal that I rented for them.It was a bit better than the one in France. Anya and her new landlady became good friends and this relationship made life much easier for her. Soon my niece Marilyn was born. They were now a family of four. During our stay in Montreal, we made many Canadian friends and, through them,we found a job for my brother-in-law, Adam. He worked hard and was soo able to support his family and move them into an apartment with more privacy. It was also closer to our beautiful home.

The day we were informed that our passports were ready and could be picked up was even more dramatic than the day I became an American citizen five years later. To celebrate this wonderful event, we immediatley went to Niagra Falls, crossed the bridge to the United States by foot, had our passports stamped and rushed back to Montreal.Now we were in possession of an athentic United States passport!

When we arrived in New York two weeks later, we found a festive atmosphere. Everbody was excited including my cousins who were still making fun of my pronounciation. I realized now, more than ever, how much I missed them and needed them. I was also happy to be back in my adopted city, New York. A big love affair had developed between me and the United States, and it is still going on.

Feliks, after working persistently on his paintings in Montreal, was eager to have a retrospective exhibition in New York. To support us, I took a position as an office manager, planning to go back to school in the near future. We moved out of New York City and bought a spacious old house in the country, where he built his studio. We desperately needed to augment our income. Good friends of ours, Bertha abd Shamai, lived in the area and operated a chicken farm. They suggested that we also could succeed in this business as we had ample space for a chicken coop. At first we were taken back by this idea, but as we listened Shamai's recommendation began to make sense. We started with 5,000 chickens which could be taken care of by one person using electric feeders. Feliks became the designated farmer. In addition to this task, he continued with his painting anddid some commercial art work. I did not mind the easy commute to New York. We were proud of ourselves and delighted to have all our loved ones spend summers and vacations with us.When an extra hand was needed they all eagerly pitched in. We both felt good about having settled near a caring and devoted family, but unfortunately my husband's sudden death interrupted his dreams and our happiness.

He died of a heart attack. This was a very difficult time for me. Everything was bleak and gloomy and hopeless. Friends and relatives came by to give me moral support and showed loving concern. Anya left her husband and children in Montreal to spend a few weeks with me. Bertha and Shamai, my two dear friends, invited me to stay for a while in their home. There they watched me closely day and night. Later they helped me sell my house. I was very grateful for the support but I realized that I myself had to face life and go on. I was determined to survive this new tragedy. Left without money and burdened with debts, I continued to work, but deperately wanting to complete by education.

Back in Canada, Anya badly wanted to join me in New York. She worried about me and felt that she could be of help to me. She filed an application

for emigration and within two years received passports for the entire family. They arrived in New York with their new addition, a wonderful girl named Arlene. For the first time since we were separated during the war, we were living close to each other in the most wonderful country, without being persecuted. After years of discrimination, we cherished our freedom on the streets of Canada and the United States, without even worrying about being stopped for identification. We walked with our head held high and occasionally, looking up to the blue sky, I whispered, "Somebody up there likes me."

We stayed close to each other, out of love and not fear. Nobody would hurt us any more. We pledged again and again to do everything in our power to stay together. But life for my sister continued to be hard. With almost no financial resources, she and her husband struggled to make life for themselves in a new country, never losing hope. Willing to take on any job, after several years they managed to save enough money, to realize their dream of owning f a small home on Long Island. I was happy to help them reach that goal. Adam, being handy, fixed the house up beautifully and it became a haven for the children and their friends. Sidney, Marilyn and Arlene grew up to be delightful people and brought joy to their parents' life. They were a close and caring family.

My sister tried to convey to them that education was the key to a successful life. She succeeded. All three completed their college education and became respected in their field of endeavor. Anya spent much time talking with the children, and enjoyed hosting their friends. Life was good but tragedy soon struck again. After the two older children graduated from college, Anya became ill and died within a year. During her illness she hardly ever spoke of herself; The children were always on her mind. In spite of her suffering which she tried to conceal, she showed great courage. And courageous she was.

So many times in the past I had admired her for being brave. Thanks to her, we endured the Russian occupation. We occasionally received an extra piece of bread or a few extra potatos because she was liked at work. During the German occupation she went straight to the enemy's office asking for work, pretending to be Polish. She worked in the kitchen and sometimes used to bring usa piece of white bread, a rarity, that Mother would hide under the pillow .In the evening we would be surprised with a thin piece of it for dessert. Anya was always there to cheer us up no

matter how bad the situation was.

After the war, I we did not reminisce about our family for many years. We were trying to build a future for us, brushing aside all the dreadful memories. It was only later that we spoke of our childhood telling each other stories that we remembered. We even shared some laughs accompanied by tears when recalling people that we had left behind. The wounds were buried all those years as it was impossible to heal them. When Anya died, I lost my most caring and devoted friend. My sister was always kind with her words and generous in her actions in time ofwar and peace. That is why her premature death left such an emptiness in her family's life and in mine.

Frustrated and very sad I was ready to submerge myself in work. I loved my adopted country and wanted to become an integral part of it. I saw many neglected and abandoned young people, who needed help. I read about schools that were short of teachers. Helping and teaching the young appealed to me and I knew that previous experience working with teenagers would be a tremendous help. I gave up the idea of practicing medicine and decided to become a teacher.

This was an excellent choice of profession. I enjoyed teaching for 30 years, until my retirement 5 years ago. After graduating from college, I got a teaching position in the high school of a New York City suburb. The placement came from Columbia University, where I was studying for a master's degree. I liked the heterogeneous makeup of the student body in my school and enjoyed working in a community that was supportive of excellence in education . I have learned more from my students more than I have taught them. They always made me think and kept me alert .It was a profound experience in my life .

High school students were quite difficult in the 60s, but thanks to all the discussions that we had, we created strong ties. I still keep in touch with many of them. The happiest experience during my teaching career, however, was meeting David, my husband-to-be. David also was enrolled at Columbia and got his teaching position through the University. We were placed in the same high school but we did not know each other since our classes in Columbia were scheduled on different days of the week.

We were both new teachers and the first few months passed without our

uttering a word to each other. School required much effort and concentration. Our first meeting occurred believe it or not, in a Broadway theater. Because of a big storm, the trains were not running anywhere and I badly needed a ride back home. David, whom I recognized from school, happened to be there too. He offered me a ride, since he lived close to my apartment. This was the beginning of our courtship. My friends saw a new sparkle in my eyes. I got lucky again.

It was my sister who was most ecstatic. Anya went through a lot with me since Feliks died. She worried endlessly about me, but after she met David, her concern for me diminished. His personality, intelligence and great sense of humor won her respect just as David had won me over. This was the first romance among our school's staff and our students played all kinds of tricks on us, outside of school. After a few months passed and I got my engagement ring, which I wore to a school play. When one girl spotted my ring, the students' enthusiasm for our romantic drama peaked to the point that many of them ran to the telephone booths in the hall to spread the word. News this big could not wait until after the play.

The students were affectionate and delighted for us, but this time it was our turn to play a trick on them. We fooled them about the date of our wedding. We wanted privacy. They understood and were very happy for us. when they heard that we had already gotten married. We invited 75 relatives and close friends to the wedding ceremony, which took place in a rose garden, overlooking the Hudson river. There were no clouds in the sky on that day and no sad thoughts on my mind.

CHAPTER FIVE

MEMORIES AND QUESTIONS

Anya was nervous and almost tripped walking down the aisle. What a good friend she was! Anya is the Sibling I was closest to, but my oldest brother, Abrasha, was also special. I admired him, because he was a serious young man whointerested in learning. It wastough for a Jew in Poland, to attend high school with very few children of the same religion.

There were no Jewish teachers on the faculty and only occasionally, would anelementary school ever hire one. To gain university admission one needed to have exceptionally good grades and pass a difficult oral matriculation test, monitored by government appointed teachers. There was also a written test that lasted for a few days.

Abrasha met these difficult standards was admitted to the Warsaw law school, while most of his friends left for Vilnius, Lithuania or Prague, Czechoslovakia for their higher education. A self confident young man, he was the only one who did not hesitate to contradict Father when he found him wrong, especially with business dealings. At the age of 18, Abrasha wanted to play a more active role in the family business. Father, an experienced businessman, would disregard his son's advice and continued to buy new property in spite of my brother's skepticism. Abrasha also believed that Mother should be more involved .This caused friction between father and son, for mother trusted her oldest childand and confided more easily in him.

I also admired my brother for being active in the community. He was involved in raising funds for his Jewish peers who were less fortunate and were forced to leave the country for further studies. My brother was very gentle and never bossed us around.When we misbehaved, he found a nice way of reprimanding us. He was sociable and softspoken, and as an introvert, he was difficult to get to know. He was always close to Asya and tried to make sure that she chose the "right" friends. The last few years before the war, he helped Father on the estate; he too would stay away for a whole week in the country.

In 1941 when he was drafted by the Russian Army, saying farewell to him was heartbreaking. I can still see him on the other side of the tall gate at the induction center. My parents did not come; They could not face him. We never saw our brother again.

Abrasha was the opposite of his younger brother,Grisha. Grisha was handsome, gregarious, cheerful, an extrovert who was always smiling He was popular with his friends and had zest for life. Grisha loved horseback riding, performing all kinds of acrobatic tricks while galloping. He made sure that all his girlfriends saw him performing. Just before the war he bacame engaged to marry a lovely blond girl. They were hoping to live on the estate, where Grisha would assist Father.

But their dreans for a happy life were shattered. His fiancee was gunned down right after the German invasion and my brother was shot about the same time, far away from his beloved.

It was difficult for me to go on after losing parents, two brothers and a sister in the war. Being left alone was emotionally paralyzing. During those terrible years each family member experienced pain, humiliation and much suffering.

During the Nazi occupation no Jew could die peacefully.Before dying, each of them had to be reminded of his or her guilt, their Jewishness. Each had to pay the price for having being born Jewish. How can one justify this war, any war? Did the world learn to comprehend the horror of gassing babies, children, young and old, healthy and sick, with people put in cattle cars, branded, processed, murdered and burned in an orderly fashion. How does one explain a tragedy of this magnitude?

Before torturing innocent children, some Germans had to first drink themselves into a stupor. Some Nazis were family men who spoke of families left behind, and worried about their welfare. Yet they were taught to follow orders and carry out historys' largest scale and most brutal extermination of human beings while an indifferent world watched. It is hard to believe, but two thirds of Europe's vast Jewish population was annihilated within a matter of months.

Every Jew was earmarked for death regardless of age or sex. In Poland, where there was the biggest concentration of Jews, more than 90% of the Jewish population was liquidated. The Auschwitz crematoria were working at full speed in the final years of the war, and hundred of thousands of Jews perished there. As years go by, I often think of those I lost who were close to me. All of them, except Anya, perished. In dreams I frequently see their faces and try to reach them, but no one is there.

My grandparents too, were victims of this monstrous war. Grandfather, a proud and handsome man with a grey beard, would always walk straight and tall beside his petite wife, whose pretty face, even in old age, resembled a Renoir painting.

It was grandfather who established the family farm. At the end of the

19th century Jews were not allowed to own land but grandfather managed large estates for the Polish aristocracy. Years later when he was allowed to buy land he became a successful farmer. My grand-father instilled his love for the land inhis family, especially, his two oldest sons. My father, in particular was imbued with the love of agriculture.

My grandparents were already quite old by the time I got to know them. Retired, they lived comfortably in their house not far from some of their children. They lived a distance from us and the bad roads and poor transportation prevented them from visiting us often.

I can still remember the love they felt for each other, holding hands whenever they were together. As soon as Grandfather opened the front door he called out her name, and she would quickly run to him on her toes, greeting him with a smile. Everybody in their hometown knew them and spoke of them affectionately. But the Germans did not care for old Jews and they were not going to waste food on them. Both grandparents were killed at the beginning of the invasion.

How did all this happen to the Jews? Was the rise of lethal anti-Semitisim a sudden occurrence? History tells us otherwise. Already at the end of the l9th century ,Wilhelm Marr founded the League of Anti-Semitisim "to save the German Fatherland from complete Judaization." Within a very short period of time the anti-Semites managed to submit a petition asking the government to bar Jews from all schools and universities and from holding public office. Believing that the Nordic, Aryan race was superior, they spread hatred among the people and called for action. [Meltzer, NEVER TO FORGET, p.26]

The defeat of Germany in World War I had a disastrous effect on the country, both economically and politically. Many people were bitter about the outcome of the war which required Germany to pay reparations to the victors. Unemployment was rising rapidly and living standards were declining. Germans were ready to support a leader who would promise them a better life and restore their self respect. It was in this atmosphere that Adolph Hitler and a small group of his followers eventually seized power.

In 1923, Hitler failed an attempt to overthrow the government. He was convicted of treason but served only nine months in jail. During that time

he wrote MEIN KAMPF in which he spoke of Jews as parasites of an inferior race. A central aim of his Nazi Party was to erase Jew from the face of the earth.

Propaganda spread quickly. The Nazi party organized young Germans who at the age of 14 became members of the Hitler Youth. To convince themselves that they were a superior race, they were trained to be cruel and efficient machines of war. Their inculcation made them physically strong and indifferent to pain. By the time they completed two years of military service they were completely brainwashed, ready to sacrifice their life for their beloved Fuhrer.

When the depression hit Germany in 1929, the Nazi party gained strength . The Germans turned to Hitler to save them. In 1933 President Hindenburg appointed Hitler head of the Nazi party and Chancellor of the republic. This was the beginning of the end.

For the German Jews, anti-Semitic laws began with required identification cards, banned jobs, destroyed homes amd prohibited travel - leading up to public beatings, open robbery and the implementation of the Final Solution.

Feliks was reticent about his war experiences, but he occasionally revealed episodes of heroic resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto and elsewhere. I was astounded to hear about Jews, raised to be passive, resisting with such ferocity. The cultural resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto was also inspiring to hear about. Jews joined together under inhuman conditions to continue medical, social, educational and even artistic activities.

When I was wandering around Germany after the war, Icould not find anyone who heard of the concentration camps or gas chambers. Yet many of them were wearing second hand clothes from other European cities that clearly were stripped from the bodies of Jewish victims. I had to ask myself if the same Germans who were receiving me so warmly, were capable of killing my family members. I tried to forgive, because not every German was a killer. It is only the young generation of Germans that are demonstrating a desire for the truth and a willingness to bear the burdens of guilt.

I was often been asked if I were capable of shooting the man who killed my family and friends. I do not think so. Death is too easy. It is more difficult to live and suffer with survivors and to have nightmares about the war.

Against all odds I went on for many years searching for traces of the loved ones I lost. In1992 Itook another trip to Israelto questionsurvivors from my hometown. During survivor gatherings some people presumed dead did find each other, and I always hoped that this miracle could happen to me. I'm always moved by visits to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial and archives in Jerusalem. When seeing the building devoted to the1,500,000 children who perished, I thinkof my four year old niece andher two year old baby brother.

It is impossible to forget but not to forgive. I just hope that this kind of madness will never happen again. No one in this civilized world has the right to impose such suffering, humiliation and death onany other people.

Occasionally I ask, "why me?" Why did I survive while millions did not. So many brighter, more educated people perished. I am still searching for an answer.

When I finally stopped asking myself overwhelming questions,it became easier to go on living. After all, I was fortunate to find David and to enjoy happiness once again. His love,devotion and understanding gave me the encouragement and strength to go on.

EPILOGUE

Writing my memoirs was a very painful experience. I beganto be obsessed with completing them. Ihad not spoken at length about mywartime experiences, despite the encouragemtn of friends. I wanted the past to remain buried. I was encouaged by the rise of anti-Semitic groups in Germany and the organizations who were denying the Holocaust. I was also not sure how David would react to my writing about Feliks. I should have

known better after being happily married to him for over thirty years.

After months of deliberation I decided to record my saga of horror and survival. Portrayals by individuals can be more important testimony than dozens of textbooks on the period. Even in the ravine outside of my native Ostrog a Holocaust memorial has been erected. The Ukranian rescuers of my cousin wrote her about this memorial, and they place flowers onit periodically. In front of the Ostrog tomb is a large boxof ashes donated by a survivor who gathered them and kept them for twenty years. In Washington D.C. thereis now a major museum and resource center on the Holocaust which I strongly recommend.

Yes, it did happen. But in my eternal optimism I still hope that we and future generations will know how to prevent another Holocaust fromhappening. The world must never again be silent about mass atrocities.

EPILOGUE

Writing my memoirs was a very painful experience. Reluctant at first, I began to be obsessed with doing it. For years, I had not spoken at length about my wartime experiences and, in spite of the encouragement of friends, I refused to delve into my past. I wanted it to remain buried. However, the news about rising anti-semitism in Germany, the doubts being expressed by some about the very existence of the Holocaust, listening to Charlayne Hunter Gault's series "Can we get along?" on the

McNeil-Lehrer News Hour and listening to the doubts being expressed by some of her guests, gave me the incentive to tell my story. There was another factor that held me back. I wondered how David would react to my writing about Feliks. I should have known better, after being happily married to him for over 30 years. His reaction and patience were beyond my expectations..

After many months of deliberation and sleepless nights, I decided that it was important to tell the world about the experiences of a young Jewish girl and her family during the Holocaust. I firmly believe that the horror of the intentional extermination of six million Jews can be best portrayed through the stories of individuals like me, who managed to survive while all around them, Jews were being slaughtered.

At present, Holocaust memorials rise all over the world including a memorial in my native town Ostrog, which was built in the forest where mass exterminations took place. Poles, Ukrainians and the few remaining Jews come there to place wreaths. My cousin's rescuers put flowers on it periodically and they were the ones to inform her about the memorial. A Holocaust memorial with the largest collection of resources and materials about this period will be opened in Washington DC in April 1993.

In Tel Aviv, part of a cemetery has a long alley of symbolic tombstones, many with small built-in ovens to memorialize those who were gassed in the crematoria. In front of Ostrog's tomb there is a large box containing ashes given by a survivor, who returned home to look for relatives. He found only ashes on the massive grave in the forest, gathered them and for 20 years kept them with him until his emmigration to Israel.

Yes it did happen, but in my eternal optimism I still hope that we and future generations will know how to prevent another holocaust. I hope that the world will never again be silent about mass atrocities.